

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

Abstract

The draft of this report was presented at the Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARCHE+10), then revised, translated and edited after the conference. The report reviews the achievements of the higher education sector in the Arab States a decade after the Regional Arab Conference and the World Conference on Higher Education in 1998. It is also about current and future challenges facing the sector. It is based on 17 national reports commissioned by UNESCO's Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States in Beirut and drafted by National Coordinators designated by the ministries in charge of Higher Education. According to the TOR set out by UNESCO each report included 1) a narrative report, 2) national data about higher education, and 3) questionnaires addressed to universities, collected, and sent to UNESCO office in Beirut. Whenever needed, additional insight was brought in from the papers included in this book.

I. Main Achievements

Arab countries have stated that they have registered a number of achievements in the past decade, from the 1997 /1998 to 2007 / 2008 academic years. These achievements differ from one country to another, according to prevailing socio-economic and political conditions. They center around four topics, listed below, which we will tackle in this chapter.

- 1) An increase in educational opportunities
- 2) Development of admission and support systems to increase educational opportunities and provide equality and equity
- 3) Diversification of higher education institutions and an increase in their number and geographical spread
- 4) Establishment of quality assurance and control structures

1. Increase in educational opportunities

a. General Increase

The number of students in higher education rose from 2.967 million in 1998 /1999 to 7.607 million in the 2007/ 2008 academic year¹, a jump of 256%, as shown in Figure 1- 1.

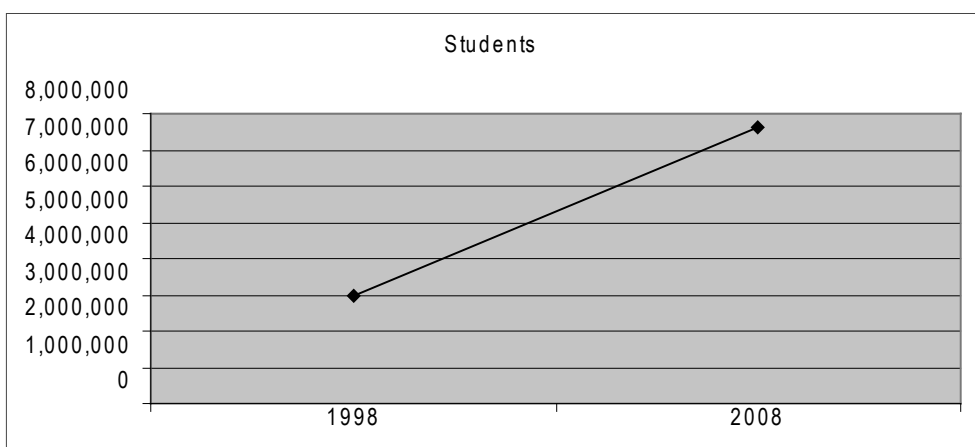
¹ Figures are calculated from statistical annexes (national data) of national reports, and otherwise from sources identified by the author; the number might be slightly higher, due to the inability to obtain complete information.

This is with regard to the absolute increase in the number of students. However, if we take into consideration that populations have also increased, from 229.3 million to 319.8² million (a rise of 139%), this means that roughly half of the increase has resulted from population growth and the rest (256 - 139 = 117) is due to the increase in social demand for higher education. In other words, there are more students who do not leave school at the secondary stage, but instead continue in institutions of higher education.

To estimate the progress that has been made, we calculate the number of students per 100,000 inhabitants on the two dates. Figure 1 - 2 shows that the number has risen from 1,294 to 2,379 per 100,000 inhabitants, an increase of 184%³.

Since the population increase exhibits disparities among age groups, we calculate the increase in the number of students in relation to the population in the corresponding age group (adopting the 18 - 24 category), which is called the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER). In fact, while the demographic increase was 139%, as we noted above, the increase in the concerned age group (18 - 24) stood at 156%, more than the total population increase. This means that the improvement in the GER was not considerable; it rose only from 18% to 22%⁴, as a general average in Arab countries.

Figure 1 - 1: Increase in the number of higher education students, 1998 and 2008

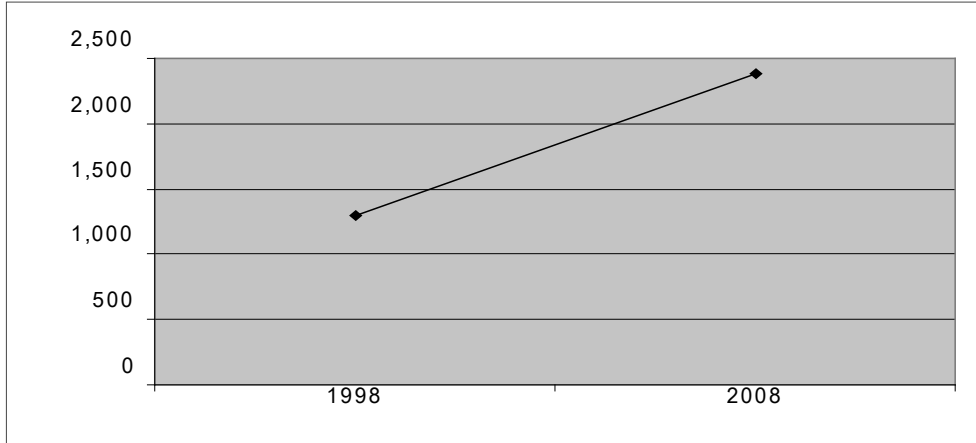


² This figure is also calculated from statistical annexes (national data) of national reports, the UIS however estimates the population in the Arab region to 321 millions in 2007.

³ The number was 2270 in 2007 (UIS).

⁴ For 2007 (www.uis.unesco.org).

Figure 1 - 2: Increase in the number of students per 100,000 inhabitants



b. Regional disparities

Certainly, there are wide differences among Arab countries in the degree access to higher education, and these differences are attributable to economic level, population density, size of rural areas, historical advantages in higher education and other factors. Two indicators can demonstrate these disparities: the number of students per 100,000 inhabitants and the GER. The first indicator is based on information gathered from national reports prepared especially for the Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARCHE+10). The second is based on data provided by UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (UIS) on its website, complemented by national reports in a number of countries⁵.

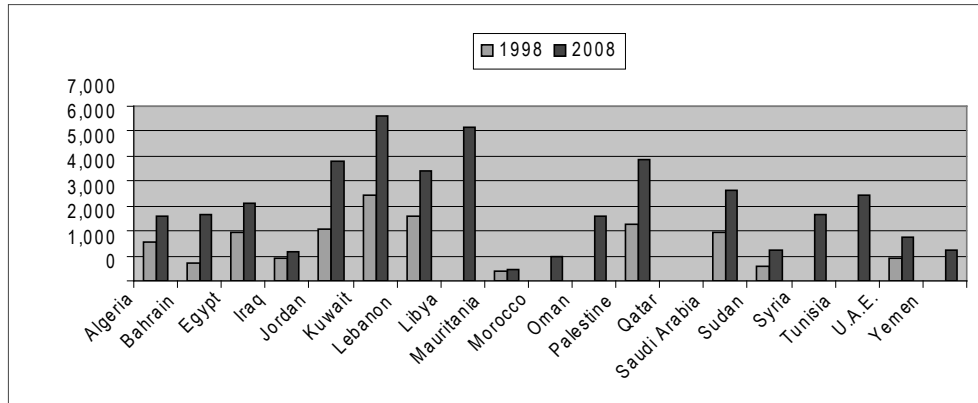
Figure 1 - 3 shows that five countries have exceeded 4,000 students per 100,000 inhabitants: Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya and Palestine. These countries are all small in size. Meanwhile, six countries' averages today are 1,294 (the Arab average for 1998) or less: Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan and Yemen. Figure 1 - 4, showing GERs, gives us the same result: the first five Arab countries mentioned above have jumped in enrollment to 40% or higher, while in the final six, the rate is still less than 20%⁶.

We should note that the following countries experienced large increases in the last ten years: Algeria (14 - 24%), Kuwait (22 - 49%), Lebanon (33 - 51%), Palestine (25 - 46%), Saudi Arabia (20 - 34%) and Tunisia (17 - 31%).

⁵ Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Syria.

⁶ We should note that some countries' national reports contained figures that were higher than those in the figure, but the available statistical data did not generate the same result (in Tunisia, for example, the rate mentioned in the report was 36%, while it was 31% according to data from UNESCO's Statistics Institute, and according to our calculations based on national data attached to the National Report, it was 33.8%). Thus, the averages in the figure remain estimates. According to UIS the GER stands at 33% for Bahrain, 17% for Kuwait, and 15% for Iraq. The difference may be attributed to population estimates (calculating the total population versus citizens only).

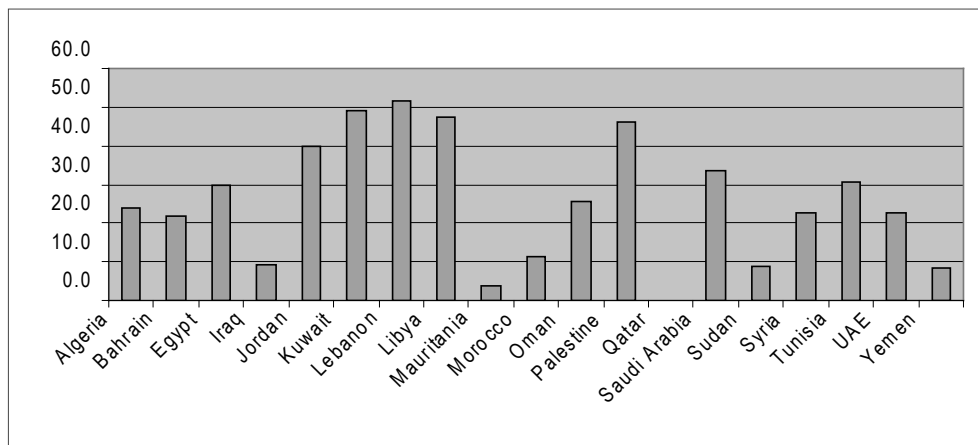
Figure 1 - 3: Number of students in Arab countries per 100,000 inhabitants (2008)⁷



c. Increase in the share of females

The share of females in higher education in Arab countries reached 50% in 2008. Figure 1 - 5 shows that the rate approached or exceeded 60% in Kuwait, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the UAE. It remains around 40% or lower in Iraq, Mauritania and Yemen.

Figure 1 - 4: Gross Enrollment Ratios in Arab countries (2007 or 2008)



⁷ According to the national Report of Kuwait the population stands at 1,054,598 for the year 2008, while the number of students in all post-secondary institutions stands at 69,591, thus the number by 100,000 inhabitants is 6,599. This figure is different from UIS estimations (only 1500). Also there is difference in the figure of Saudi Arabia.

Figure 1 - 5: Percentage of females out of total enrolled students in higher education in Arab countries (2008)

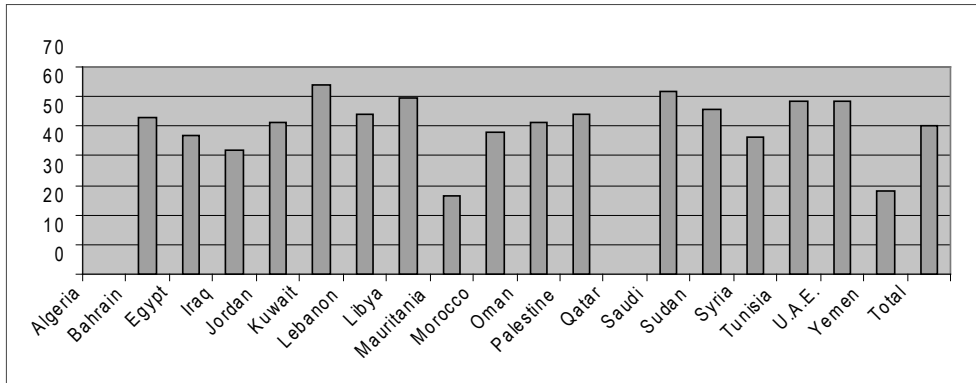
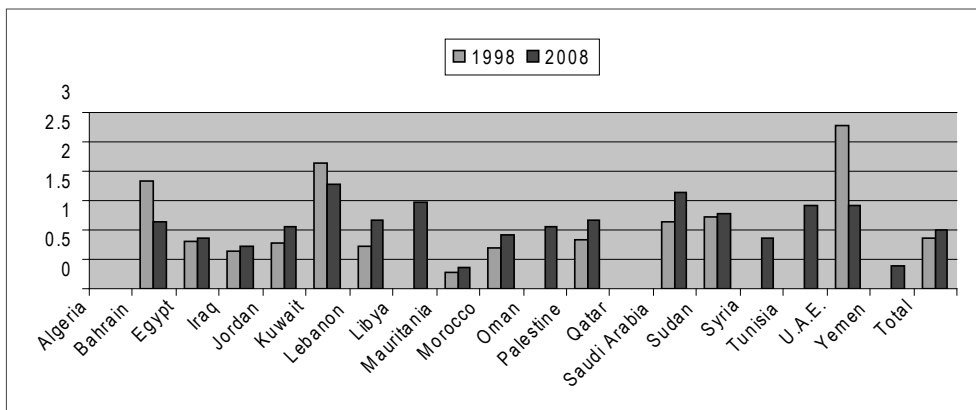


Figure 1 - 6: Gender Parity Index in Arab Countries (1998 - 2008)



To determine the extent of growth in the share of females, we calculate the Gender Parity Index for 1998 and 2008 and display this in Figure 1 - 6. This figure shows that the Index rose from 0.86 to 1, i.e. total parity over the last decade. Most Arab countries achieved progress in this field, particularly Saudi Arabia. However, it is interesting that the share of females fell in the UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait; perhaps this is attributable to non-national male students, since the Index in these countries remains higher than 1.

2. Development of admission and support systems to increase educational opportunities and provide equality and equity

A number of Arab countries regulate admission (and distribution of students) in higher education institutions through a centralized system based on the grade that students obtain for their high school certificate. However, other countries enforce different admission measures, such as open enrollment, entrance exams, or rely on international or national testing, etc. The centralized system provides equality of opportunity because it applies specific criteria to all, without discrimination. However, this does not necessarily secure an equitable distribution of these

opportunities whenever students are subject to the same criteria of selection, while they have unequal geographical and social backgrounds. To confront this situation, a number of steps have been taken, leading to an increase in opportunities, the numbers of students, and equity in distribution.

The increase in opportunities has also resulted from economic considerations, as higher education institutions have sought to open up new tracks in education, which secure additional income for institutions. These two types of measures are detailed below.

Measures to provide equality and equity:

1) Royal donation

“Giving opportunities to students in remote areas for admission in various specializations, at the minimum acceptance level in each specialization, thanks to a Royal Donation that aims at granting students from these regions additional opportunities, to compensate for what they lack in educational and geographical profiles compared to more privileged areas” (Jordan, p. 32)⁸.

2) Geographical admission

“The Higher Education Council in Sudan has issued a decision that assigns special consideration to admission in less developed states, to achieve balanced development in Sudan’s various states, known as geographical admission, i.e. admission and competition take place among the people of a single state. In addition, a special admission percentage is allocated to students from rural and remote regions and war-torn areas in the South and Darfur” (Sudan, p. 26).

3) Scholarships and loans

“At the beginning of 2001, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education established the loan fund system for students in higher education institutions, to help cover the financial needs of students who cannot pay their tuition. From the 2000 / 2001 to 2007 / 2008 academic years, a total of \$90 million in student loans were awarded through the fund, of which \$60 million were offered to students who graduated, and \$30 million to students who were still in school, while loan recipients did not pay off these loans” (Palestine, p. 6).

“The government awards university scholarships and loans that are based on the annual income of the student’s family; these scholarships and loans are a form of social justice. Approximately 35% of students at Tunisian universities receive these scholarships” (Tunisia, pp. 10, 14 and 65).

“The scholarships awarded to students in higher education in Morocco covered 31% of the country’s total number of students (392,610)” (Morocco, p. 23).

“The Ministry of Higher Education provides scholarships to students of families on social insurance and having a limited income to enroll in the Sultanate’s higher education institutions. The ministry has paid attention to this segment of the population since the program began in the 2000 / 2001 academic year, in an attempt to promote its conditions and support it so that families become productive and provide themselves with a decent life, and exiting the umbrella of social security” (Oman, pp. 35 - 36).

Measures to increase opportunities, for economic considerations or due to the limited enrollment capacity at state universities:

4) Parallel education

Accepting an additional number of students in each specialization at state universities, in exchange of fees covering the entire cost of their study (Syria, p. 113; Jordan, p. 31; Yemen, p. 28).

⁸ These sources refer to national reports.

5) Education cost system

Students are accepted at various higher education programs with the exception of medicine, health sciences, engineering and IT, in exchange for a relatively low cost compared to parallel education; instruction generally takes place in the evenings (Yemen, p. 28; Sudan, p. 34).

6) Domestic scholarships

“In Kuwait, a domestic scholarship policy and a plan for 2006 were endorsed, to compensate the inability of the University of Kuwait and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training to increase the number of their students” (Kuwait, pp. 23 - 24).

“In 1426 H (2005), the ministry put forward a scholarship project at non-governmental universities and faculties, with 10,000 scholarships over five years. These scholarships are offered based on the quality of the students’ academic performance, in addition to reports on institutional and program performance submitted by the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment on these universities and faculties. Some are full scholarships and cover the costs of education, while others are partial scholarships, covering part of the tuition in various specializations required by the job market” (Saudi Arabia, pp. 7 and 16).

“The Ministry of Higher Education provides scholarships to the children of emigrants within Yemen or gives scholarships to some students studying at private universities” (Yemen, p. 28).

“The ministry is also making efforts to increase enrollment capacity by offering 4,000 state scholarships annually for enrollment in private universities and faculties in the Sultanate” (Oman, p. 29).

3. Diversification of higher education institutions and increase in their number and geographical spread

Policies and measures by Arab governments over the last decade, and the rising demand for higher education, have led to a considerable expansion in the number of higher education institutions and considerable diversity in the features of these institutions. This diversity has taken several forms: state/private education; national/foreign universities; local programs/partnership programs with foreign universities abroad; short-term/long-term studies, etc.

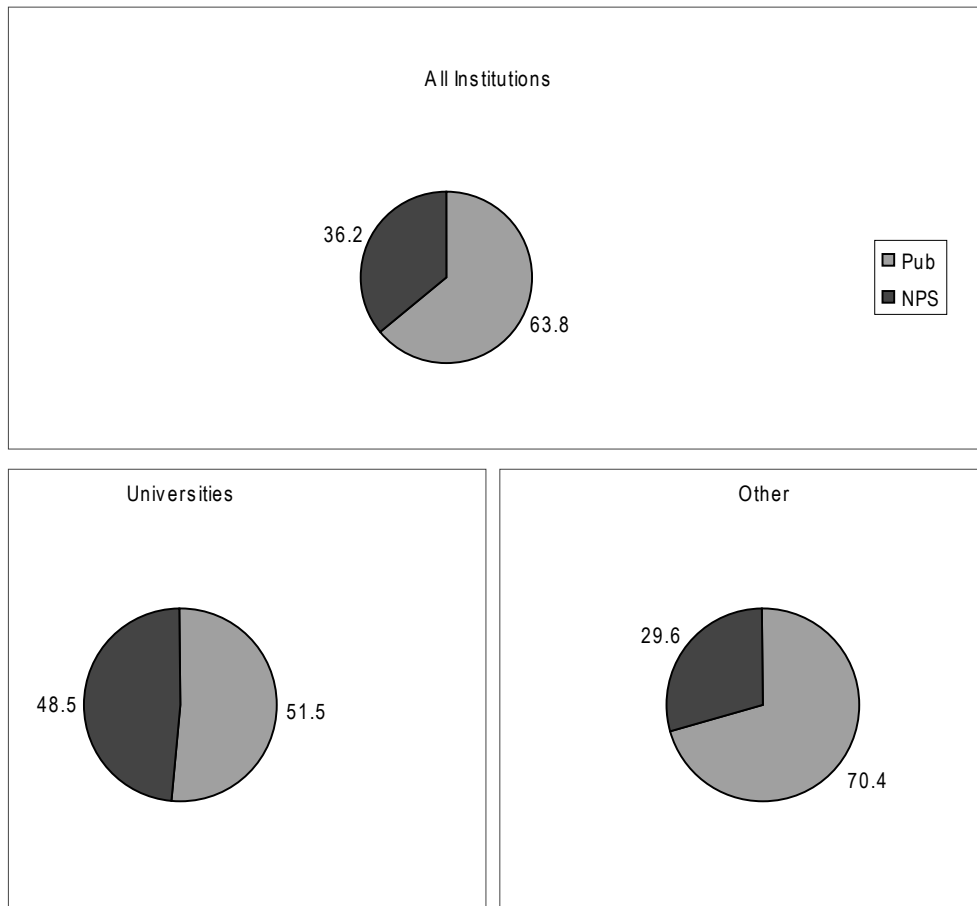
The number of universities active in the Arab region today stands at 398, compared to a mere 174 a decade ago; i.e. the number has more than doubled. If we add the higher institutes, community colleges, teacher-training institutes and other higher education institutions not affiliated with universities, the total number rises to 1,139.

Below we list the achievements by Arab countries with regard to diversification:

7) Non- public universities

Governments have allowed the establishment of non-public higher education institutions, which are sometimes called private or civil institutions, according to the custom followed in each country, or according to the distinction in a given country between profit (private) and not-for-profit (civil) institutions.

Figure 1 - 7: Share of the public and non-public sectors of higher education institutions, 2008

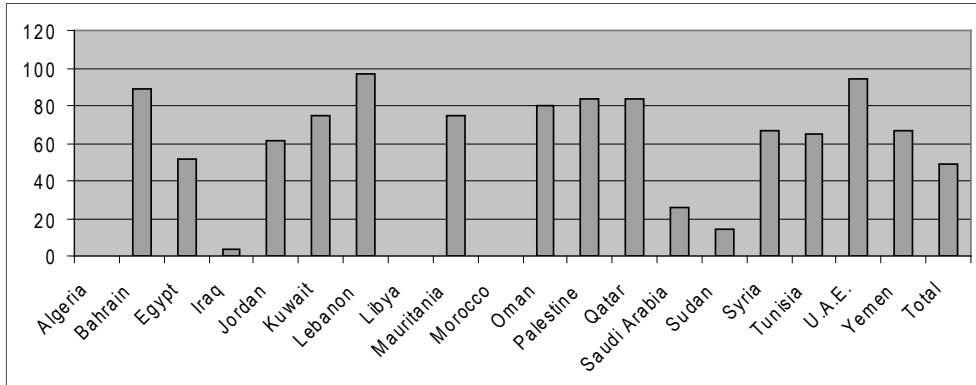


In general, the non-public sector today accounts for about 36% of higher education institutions in the Arab region, as shown in Figure 1 - 7; its share rises in universities compared to other institutions, and it is as if the opening of non-university institutions remains, fundamentally, the responsibility of the government sector.

Arab countries differ strongly in the size of the non-public sector (in universities). Figure 1 - 8 shows that in some countries, the share of the non-public sector's exceeds 80% (Bahrain, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, the UAE) while it is below 20%, or reaches zero, in others (Algeria, Iraq, Libya and Morocco).

The non-public sector includes national universities and foreign universities affiliated with the country to which they are administratively and academically linked. Some follow the Anglo Saxon system, for universities based in the UK and the US, and others follow the German, French or Russian systems. Some national universities are based on partnership or twinning agreements with foreign universities, such as the German University, New York University in Jordan, or some institutions in Arab Gulf countries.

Figure 1 - 8: Share of non-public sector universities in Arab countries (2008)



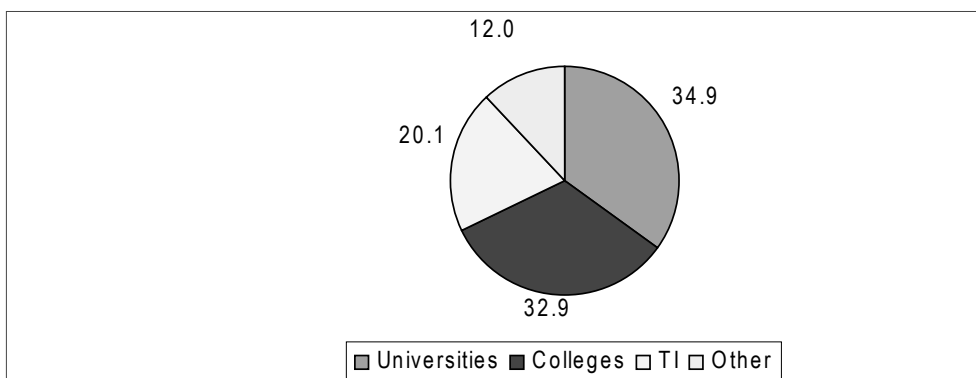
8) Open universities, virtual universities and remote learning

An open university was established in Kuwait, with branches in Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Bahrain and Palestine. The Jerusalem Open University (Palestine) comprises 23 centers in the West Bank and Gaza; it attracts around one-third of Palestinian higher education students. As for virtual universities, we can mention: the Virtual University in Syria, which was established in 2002 and comprises 18 centers; the Virtual University in Tunisia, which offers remote learning and was established in 2002 to employ digital technology, and strives to offer 20% of instructional units in the universities at a non-attendance-base (Tunisia, pp. 20 and 22).

9) Non-university institutions

We have noted above the growing size of higher education institutions outside universities, and Figure 1 - 9 shows that these institutions are taking different forms, such as colleges (33%) and higher technical institutes and community colleges (20%). Examples of this are colleges of community development in Sudan, which offer short-term programs for rural women, specializing in nutrition, public health, environmental health, and ceramics, and participants receive certificates of attendance (Sudan, p. 33), and institutes for the education of mid-level personnel in technology, business administration, tourism, translation, heritage professions, arts, languages and other fields that meet the need of the job market (Tunisia, pp. 39 - 40).

Figure 1 - 9: Distribution of higher education institutions, by type (2008)



10) Geographical spread

By geographical spread, we mean that a number of new universities, particularly state institutions, have been established in the most remote geographical areas, with an estimated average of at least one per district or governorate (Tunisia, p. 28; Sudan, p. 5; Libya, p. 11; Egypt, p. 5; Saudi Arabia, p. 13). We also mean that many state and non-state universities have established branches in various parts of the country, in order to be close to students and facilitate their enrollment (Lebanon, p. 9; Palestine p. 2, Syria pp. 9 - 10; Egypt, p. 5).

4. Establishment of quality assurance and control structures

a. Established structures

Ten countries have established commissions or committees for quality control and quality assurance.

- 1) **Jordan:** The Accreditation Council was established in 1990 in order to supervise quality control, create criteria to accredit private institutions, to adopt, modify and develop them, and to monitor implementation. On 25 March 2007, a law was enacted, replacing the Accreditation Council with the Higher Education Accreditation Commission (HENC), which enjoys financial and administrative independence. The related standards, regulations and instructions remained in effect until they are modified or amended, while the scope was widened, to include public and non-public higher education institutions (p. 12).
- 2) **UAE:** The Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) was established in 2000. "The Commission's work focused on evaluating the conditions of private higher education institutions, based on licensing and accreditation criteria; this resulted in the closure of 16 private educational institutions between 2001 and 2003, because they did not meet the conditions and requirements stipulated for licensing. Also, a periodic review of all private education institutions is performed annually (institutional accreditation) and academic programs are re-accredited once every five years" (p. 6).
- 3) **Tunisia:** On 29 June 1993, a ministerial decision was issued, regulating the activities of the Comité National d'Évaluation (National Committee of Evaluation, or CNE). During the 2006/ 2007 academic year, the Committee launched self-evaluation activities in all of the country's 190 institutions (faculties and institutes) affiliated with 13 state universities. After the internal evaluation, an external evaluation was performed on each institution, conducted by two or three experts specialized in the concerned program⁹. This Committee is considered the nucleus of and prelude to the National Commission that will be established. "The National Commission of Evaluation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation, whose establishment was stipulated by the new Higher Education Law, and will be created within two years, to supervise the provision of mechanisms for evaluation, quality assurance and accreditation" (p. 81).
- 4) **Saudi Arabia:** The National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) established in 2004; it enjoys an official legal status and administrative and financial independence and is supervised by the Council for Higher Education. The Commission aims at controlling the quality of higher education and guaranteeing the performance of its outputs, so that they meet the requirements of the labor market (p. 22).

⁹ El-Amine, Adnan (2007), *Report on Higher Education in Tunisia*, UNESCO, unpublished.

- 5) **Sudan:** The High Commission for Evaluation and Accreditation was established in 2003, in order to improve and promote the performance of and guarantee the quality of outputs in higher education institutions (p.14).
- 6) **Oman:** The Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) was established in 2001; it regulates accreditation and evaluation and quality control in higher education institutions. The OAC is managed by an independent commission affiliated with the Higher Education Council (p. 9).
- 7) **Palestine:** The Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC) was established in 2004, as an independent body that is administratively affiliated with the minister of higher education. The Commission licenses new higher education institutions, awards accreditation to new programs and performs quality assurance, through work mechanisms and criteria that it develops for this purpose. The Quality Assurance Fund has also been established, in order to improve the management of higher education, provide guidance and ensure quality (p. 8).
- 8) **Kuwait:** The Private University Council is concerned with accrediting private universities; its tasks include: 1) examining applications to establish private educational institutions; 2) specify the requirements of academic accreditation for private educational institutions, accredit their programs, and review their performance, to verify their commitment to the contents of the establishment decrees; 3) adopt criteria and conditions that should be met in the study programs at private educational institutions and review these conditions and criteria; 4) accredit degrees issued by private educational institutions and determine equivalency according to measures decided for this purpose; 5) decide on abolishing, merging, halting the activities of private institutions¹⁰. Kuwait's National Report mentioned a project to establish a Commission on Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance, whose tasks include: protecting state and private higher education institutions through granting accreditation certificates and performing quality control on their educational and specialized programs, guaranteeing the right of investors in and beneficiaries of higher education to high-quality education (p. 78).
- 9) **Libya:** The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Center (QAAC) for higher education institutions was established in 2006; it seeks to design, develop and implement a comprehensive system of evaluation, quality assurance and accreditation for national higher education institutions in order to develop the educational process, and arrive at the highest levels of quality, efficiency and excellence (pp. 29 - 30).
- 10) **Egypt:** A decision to establish the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAEE) was issued in 2006; the body is independent and affiliated with the prime minister (p. 8).

b. Projects and structures underway

Five countries are on their way to establishing national commissions for quality control:

- 11) **Bahrain:** "Article 9 of Law 3 of 2005, on higher education, stipulates that 'an Academic Accreditation Committee' shall be established, formed of a number of experts and specialists in higher education, by a decision by the prime minister, based on the recommendation of the Cabinet; this Committee shall be tasked with setting down academic criteria and making recommendations for the accreditation of higher

¹⁰ Implementation regulations of Law 34 of 2000 on establishing private universities <http://www.puc.edu.kw/index.php?TP=RuleSC2>

education institutions operating in the Kingdom, to be endorsed by the Council.” Measures to establish the Committee are now being taken and the necessary funds are being secured (p. 62). In addition the decree 32 was issued in 2008 to establish the “Association of Quality Assurance and Training» (p. 28).

- 12) **Syria:** The Higher Education Council decided on 10 January 2005 to establish a permanent committee at the Ministry of Higher Education, called the “Higher Committee on Quality and Accreditation,” with the following tasks: adopting ongoing self-evaluation at universities, setting down criteria for quality and academic distinction, establishing a quality assurance system at public and private higher education institutions that shall perform external auditing of quality and adopt criteria for quality and academic distinction and the bases of the government’s recognition and accreditation of degrees, and proposing a suitable organizational structure to establish a Higher Committee on Quality and Accreditation, and determining its administrative subordination (p. 17).
- 13) **Iraq:** “The Independent Commission on Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, at the ministry’s office, is under legislation, in addition to centers and units for quality assurance at Iraqi universities; at present, work is underway on designing an integrated system for computerized quality assurance” (pp. 14, 21).
- 14) **Morocco:** A system for evaluating and accrediting programs is underway (p. 14).
- 15) **Yemen:** A decision to establish a Council on Academic Accreditation was expected in May 2009; the Council will be concerned with improving the quality of higher education in state universities and particularly civil universities; this will represent a big step forward, toward quality in higher education programs (p. 12).

5. Conclusion

The above indicates the huge efforts and many achievements by Arab countries in the last decade (since 1998). These achievements have changed the features of higher education in the Arab region. The number of students has doubled, the number of higher education institutions has more than doubled, and the share of females in higher education has increased considerably. This has resulted from population growth and the rise in the social demand for higher education; it has also resulted from reforms and amendments carried out by government authorities in the field of admissions, support, and the spread of state education institutions into remote areas, in order to increase opportunities and provide more equity and justice in securing these opportunities. The types of higher education have become more diverse and non-government institutions have appeared in big numbers, along with foreign universities or partnership programs with foreign universities.

In addition to educational opportunities, Arab countries have made achievements in establishing national commissions for accreditation and quality assurance. Out of ten such commissions, eight have been established since 1998. However, in the establishment of these bodies, several items stand out:

- 1) the overwhelming majority of them remain oriented toward the “accreditation” of private universities (which is classified as quality control more than quality assurance);
- 2) they all remain in a transitory phase and have yet to arrive at an independent, integrated structure or one that enjoys authority or moral value in the entire sector, compared to their advanced counterparts in the world;
- 3) two out of 17 countries’ national reports did not mention anything about issuing legislation to establish structures for quality assurance (Lebanon and Mauritania), in addition to two



other countries which did not issue a national report by the time of preparation of the regional report (Qatar and Algeria).

In general, the national reports did not mention tangible achievements when it comes to improving quality, the university's social responsibility or administration and management; what was mentioned with regard to financing involved plans and policies. These missing items certainly constitute challenges that Arab countries face in the field of higher education, and these challenges will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

II. Initiatives and Innovations

By initiatives and innovations, we mean the establishment of new forms of instruction and regulation intended to help solve certain problems and improve the performance and management of higher education institutions.

These initiatives and these innovations which took place in Arab countries during the last decade can be classified according to following seven categories:

- 1) Establishing new types of universities
- 2) Establishing new types of faculties and programs
- 3) Creating ICT (information communications technology) systems
- 4) Establishing university networks and databases
- 5) Launching initiatives to enhance the quality of higher education
- 6) Launching initiatives to support scientific research
- 7) Establishing new systems for admission, teaching and evaluating outputs

Below, we outline the relevant findings of national reports.

1. Establishing new types of universities

a. Branches of foreign universities

In the UAE, branches of foreign universities have been established in "free education zones," as the country's Free Zone Authority supplied the infrastructure, in the form of buildings, as well as central student services. The local government authorities supplied practically all of the funding, as in the case of the Sorbonne in Abu Dhabi, Middlesex University in Dubai, George Mason University in Ras al-Khaimah, etc. In Iraq, Saint Clemons University from the UK, the Free Dutch University and the Danish Higher Academy have established branches, while in Mauritania, private universities have appeared as a new phenomenon in higher education; some of these institutions are branches for networks of foreign universities (Mauritania, p. 16).

b. Partnership and cooperation agreements

In Jordan, the Ministry of Higher Education concluded an agreement with Germany's Education Ministry to establish a German-type university in order to educate "students who are able to deal with local, regional and international markets. This (new) university has signed several partnership agreements with German universities to train its students in their final years, as part of the graduation requirements." The university is responsible for all of the resulting expenditures, with the exception of students' daily expenses. Some public universities in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Oman have concluded partnership and cooperation agreements with a number of foreign universities, to carry out joint instruction programs, especially for post graduate studies, or in order to grant joint certificates.





2. Establishing new types of faculties and programs

The following are examples of such initiatives:

a. Faculties

In Bahrain, the Bahrain Teachers' Faculty was established in 2006; its mission involves the pre-service and in-service training of teachers under an agreement with the National Institute of Education in Singapore as its international partner. This program is free of charge, and students also receive a monthly stipend; in addition, the Faculty's graduates are provided with job opportunities in the Ministry of Education. In Oman, five faculties of education (out of seven) have been converted into applied science faculties, due to the surplus in graduates majoring in education. In these applied faculties, the following is stipulated: 1) the period of study is five years (a preparatory year and four years to receive a Bachelor's degree); 2) study should be linked to internationally-recognized academic institutions; 3) the majority of the curriculum should be in English, and e-learning should be adopted as a method of study. In Sudan, a ministerial decision in 2003 commissioned a study on Model Faculty in various specializations, and established suitable criteria for conducting comparative studies on existing and proposed faculties; the model faculty should be employed as a norm for similar faculties in Sudanese universities (Sudan, p. 12).

b. Short-term programs

In Tunisia, short-term studies with a vocational emphasis have been developed to train people for small- and medium-sized businesses, in the domains of technology, business administration, tourism, translation, heritage professions, the arts, artisanal production and languages. These short-term studies are offered via a network of applied educational institutions, whose task is to prepare students for these professions (pp. 37 - 38). In Sudan, short-term programs for rural women have been established; these focus on nutrition, public health and environmental health (p. 33). In Kuwait, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training is organizing short-term training programs in technical sciences, commercial and health sciences, computers, the humanities and psychiatry (Kuwait, p. 17). In Sudan, the Technical Education Commission offers, through its faculties, a 12-week training program on various topics that are directly linked to the job market (Sudan, pp. 19 - 20).

c. Doctoral Institutes

At the Lebanese University, three doctoral higher institutes have been established, with the following responsibilities: coordinating research plans; activating and developing research activities; follow-up and periodical evaluation; proposing research topics or projects to establish research centers and review them; managing and following up measures to obtain the HDR certificate (Habilitation to Direct Research); proposing and following up research cooperation programs between LU and research universities and institutions in Lebanon and abroad; proposing and managing doctoral programs and following up work on doctoral thesis topics (Lebanon, p. 14).

3. Creating ICT (information communications technology) systems

a. National Information Technological Center (NITC)

The Center is considered the executive reference-point for IT in government institutions with regard to all topics related to purchasing, employing and using IT resources, according to established criteria, and assisting in the drafting of budgets for all IT resources, from equipment and software to information and human resources activities (Jordan).

b. National Information System

All institutions active in the public and private sectors participate in this decentralized system; the system uses the internet to transfer, display and exchange information (Jordan).



c. Intranet

The program provides e-communication between the minister of higher education and the presidents of universities and directors general, to discuss topics of mutual concern (Tunisia).

d. System of academic and financial Links (AF-Link)

The AF-Link system was established to regulate academic and financial matters for grantee students who are studying abroad or in the country (Oman).

e. Geographical Information System (GIS)

The GIS system provides information such as the location of higher education institutions; demographic information; commercial, industrial and agricultural activities; networks of roads and airports; and other statistical information necessary for all higher education institutions, in order to take decisions based on sound information (Saudi Arabia).

f. Government portals/e-government

E-portals allow one to discover a country through various topics and methods: learning about state administrative officials, examining the country's need for employees, relevant bureaucratic measures, degree conversion and contact with virtual universities for remote education, and continuing education for employees to improve their expertise in various areas, in a way that suits their working hours (Mauritania). The Federal E-Government Project (UAE) is an important strategic project, as are local governments in the various Emirates. In fact, the huge and rapid internet-related development in communications technology has been reflected in attention to the higher education sector. In Iraq, the implementation of the National E-Government Project at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has continued throughout various stages; students, teachers, civil society institutions and various state sectors, in addition to citizens, may access the Ministry's website. In Saudi Arabia, MOHE has prepared 21 e-programs and systems for financial and administrative operations and procedures, while a new data center has been established and all administrative units and administrations at the ministry have been linked to an integrated e-network (p. 4). In Jordan, "knowledge stations" serve as a practical step on the road to adopting IT applications in local communities, as a prelude to improving the usages of e-government in serving citizens where they live and work."

4. Establishing university networks and databases

a. Higher education network

In Tunisia, the National University Network (Réseau National Universitaire-NRU) links all higher education institutions in an advanced national network that is linked to the Khawarzami Center, which represents the backbone of the national university high-capacity network, which in turn links the Center's branches and Tunis Telecom with the internet and the European Research Network, via Tunis' Internet Agency. In Tunisia also, the Administrative Communication System at Universities aims at supporting media systems among universities, particularly through the creation of networks of university libraries, the generalization of remote registration, and guarantee of the flow of scientific media among universities. In Sudan, the higher education network links higher education institutions in various parts of the country and establishes a virtual library system, which contains a unified index, sites of local and international academic periodicals, and free international databases in all academic inquiries, in addition to connections to Arab and international libraries, connections to library associations, and information networks. In Syria, the Syrian Higher Education Network (SHERN) links universities networks, institutes and research centers with each other and with the internet. In Morocco, the Marwan Network provides media and communications systems to educational institutions and their linkage to networks of international institutions of education and research (Morocco, p. 33).



b. Linking with the Euro-Mediterranean Network of Education and Research

This project aims at linking National Networks of Education and Research (NREN) in Mediterranean countries with each other, and linking them to the Higher European Network of Education and Research (GEANT) (Syria, p. 125).

c. Scientific research databases

The idea to establish research databases arose a short time after the birth of the Scientific Research Council and was included in the organizational chart of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education at the beginning of 2003; it embraced the idea of establishing such a body and creating a public administration for development and scientific research; this began at the end of 2003 (Palestine, p. 6).

d. E-Library

At the beginning of 2008, state universities in Jordan completed “the biggest federation of libraries project in the Arab world, based on applying unified library management systems in all state universities” (p. 47). In Egypt, a central unit for digital libraries and automation of university libraries has been created; this also includes establishing a gathering of Egyptian universities to subscribe to digital library databases. This system allows searches for a holding and the identification of the libraries from which it can be borrowed, the subscription to digital library databases, and the automation of work systems for university libraries (p. 8). In Iraq, the Iraqi Virtual Science Library project has been implemented, by securing sources and scientific reference materials through local and international networks, and by using available databases from international publishing houses. This project was carried out in seven Iraqi universities during its initial stage (p. 26).

5. Launching initiatives to boost the quality of higher education

Arab States have established centers and institutions to support higher education and scientific research and others to boost adequacy between higher education and the job market. The following are some examples of such initiatives:

a. The Fund for Quality Development

The Fund for Quality Development is part of the Higher Education Project, which aims at improving the management and orientation of higher education and assuring its quality, boosting internal and external efficiency for a higher education system, creating incentives, and providing the necessary foundations to improve the efficiency and quality of institutions of higher education (Palestine, p. 8).

b. Hussein Fund for Creativity and Excellence

The Fund was established following an initiative by 25 banks and financial institutions operating in Jordan; it seeks to encourage excellence and support creativity and leadership for individuals and institutions in the public and private sectors. The Fund’s work focuses on quality assurance in higher education institutions (Jordan).

c. University Observatory

An Observatory is to be established in every university; it will be based on gathering information linked to the institution and its social-economic milieu, so that the university can undertake the analysis necessary to help it conduct prospective studies to link the university to economic institutions, in order to achieve relevancy between educational programs and the needs of the labor market (Tunisia and Morocco).

d. King Abdullah II Development Fund

The Fund functions as an NGO and it aims at encouraging citizens to establish economic projects



and supports them by increasing productivity, through taking part in the training of citizens (Jordan).

e. National Center for Human Resource Development

The Center improves relevance between the outcomes of the training and educational program and the requirements of development, in addition to continuing to evaluate development programs in the entire educational system (Jordan).

f. A Doctor for Every Factory

This project aims to make industrial firms benefit from the expertise of faculty members to identify the opportunities for establishing cooperation and development programs between these institutions and faculty at universities of applied sciences and technology; it also provides students with training and job opportunities after graduation (Jordan).

g. Incubators

Incubators receive the ideas of innovators and convert them into projects after performing feasibility studies and providing an integrated services bundle for these ideas that includes location; technical, marketing and administrative support; consulting; and financing methods, so that they become fully-integrated projects that can grow, and are able to overcome initial operations difficulties (Kuwait, Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon).

6. Launching initiatives to support research

a. Scientific Research Commission

This Commission was established in 2008 to carry out the regulation of scientific research activities at existing public and private higher education institutions and fund individual and national research projects in priority areas (UAE).

b. Centers of Excellence in Scientific Research

The Ministry of Higher Education has supported the establishment of a number of centers of excellence in research, in a number of universities, in order to create an effective and active system of scientific research. In establishing these centers, the Higher Education Ministry has followed a competitive method based on criteria and specifications of centers of excellence in international arbitration and full funding for five years, with periodic evaluation (Saudi Arabia).

c. Scientific Research Chairs

Chairs of scientific research are a type of community partnership in supporting the research system in strategic scientific fields; at King Saud University, for example, there are 80 such chairs. At King Abdel-Aziz University there are 15 and King Fahd University has 14 (Saudi Arabia, p. 19). Chairs of scientific research are used to arrive at inter-cultural understanding, which leads to spreading a culture of peace and cooperation among nations. These chairs are also used to help us arrive at a contemporary international community that lives in peace and present contemporary viewpoints, to highlight Oman's cultural heritage in an era of globalization (Oman).

d. Nanotechnology Research

The ministry has established four research centers on nanotechnology at King Saud University, King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals, King Abdel-Aziz University, and Taibah University. The ministry has performed follow-up with these institutions to complete infrastructure and launch their programs (Saudi Arabia, p. 14).

e. Science Council

The council was established in 2005 in order to regulate scientific research issues and encourage and support research through various financial and other means; the Center is the most important authority in this field. It coordinates among institutions and groups interested in scientific research,



and is responsible for preparing an integrated national strategy on scientific research, following up the strategy, upgrading it, and identifying priorities and supervising implementation (Oman).

f. Scientific Associations

The MOHE has launched competitive programs among associations to encourage them to offer creative activities that meet their goals, develop the bases for implementation and the standard of related technical and administrative regulation, improve their frameworks, diversify sources of funding in support of their activities and programs, and establish international alliances with them. The ministry is also supporting associations through funding the establishment of a headquarters that will enable it to become independent in its activities and develop its professional work. There are 123 scientific associations at universities in Saudi Arabia (p. 14).

7. Establishing new systems for admission, instruction and evaluating outcomes

The following initiatives have been identified by the national reports:

a. Unified Admission Center

The Center was established in 2006, to regulate the process of submitting admission and enrolment forms in higher education institutions for graduates with a general certificate or the equivalent degree. The Center aims at achieving equal opportunity for all students who apply to higher education institutions, offering orientation information to students and parents about the opportunities available and terms of admission and providing statistical reports on students who have been accepted (Oman).

b. Higher Education Number

This refers to the student's registration number with the General Secretariat of the Higher Education Council; it is assigned to each student in private higher education in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The number is part of the admission and registration procedures for the student in these institutions. The higher education number is also used in student transfers from one institution of higher education to another. The number is required to allow the student to take examinations and is used in documents and certificates and to follow up the student's study performance and attendance; it allows the student to obtain all services offered by the General Secretariat of the Higher Education Council (Bahrain, p. 30).

c. Regulating Centralized Tests of Students' Aptitude in Secondary Education

The Ministry of Higher Education has developed a national test for English-language and math abilities, to measure aptitude of secondary school graduates and use the results of these tests as an indicator for admitting students into state universities (UAE).

d. National Center for Measurement and Evaluation

The National Center for Measurement and Evaluation in Saudi Arabia was established in 2000 in order to specify and implement criteria for admission and measurement. Its work includes: testing the general aptitude of high school graduates in two languages; achievement test; testing the general aptitude of university students; testing the general aptitude of female students; English language testing; and testing the general aptitude of talented students (Saudi Arabia, p. 9). In Kuwait, the Center for Measurement and Instruction Development prepares academic aptitude tests and administers these tests three times during the school year. Correction takes place in standardized fashion and the results are analyzed statistically; the Center sends them to students via SMS and announces the results on the center's website. The Center performs a periodic evaluation of curricula and faculty performance, via a questionnaire (p. 19). In Syria, work is underway on the establishment of a National Center for Evaluation and Measurement in



Higher Education, to function as a center for distinction in research and studies on the needs of higher education in the field of measurement, evaluation and admission policies (p. 21).

e. University Graduate Competence Exam

Students at state and private universities take a normative evaluation test in each specialization at the national level, reflecting the competence of graduates and universities that award program certificates; taking the test is a condition for certification of the degree that a graduate receives, but not for graduation. The competence test aims at: 1) conducting a normative evaluation of the scientific aptitude of graduates of Syrian private and public universities, and 2) providing the concerned university with information that it can use in evaluating and developing curricula and improving teaching methods (Syria, p. 19).

f. Remote Student Services Systems

IT systems for providing higher education-related services cover the following: 1) providing remote registration services to students in government higher education institutions through a single website, designated for enrollment; and 2) guiding successful high school graduates in the selection of universities that match their aspiration, via an orientation website that employs fairness and transparency (Tunisia).

g. Scholarships

A large-scale scholarship program has been launched in Saudi Arabia with the goal of achieving a qualitative jump in the outputs of higher education and the specializations needed by the country at the bachelor's, Master's and Ph.D. stages and medical fellowships, and improving these outputs to international levels. The program began in 2005 with 2,800 scholarship recipients and now counts 50,000 scholarship recipients in vital specializations, and leading universities in a number of countries, including the US, the UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, Holland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, Japan, Malaysia, China, India, Singapore and South Korea (Saudi Arabia, p. 7)

h. LMD System

This European system has three levels: L (BA/BS, or «licence», three years); M (Master's, two years) and D (doctorate, three years). Four Arab countries – Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritania and Lebanon, have adopted this system.

i. Digital Pedagogy Content

The Tunis Virtual University has opened digital units in various specializations and has worked to modernize these units and review their pedagogical and technical content, and create a unified structure of affiliated units in all scientific specializations; a number of these digital units are now on-line (RPL) (Tunisia).

j. Language Village

A language village was established in Tunisia in 2008; it functions as a university center for language training, based on training students specializing in languages in sound communication and rhetorical skills, supervised by native speakers of the languages; its educational programs cover scientific, cultural, entertainment and sports activities. The center opened its doors to the public as part of continuing education and educating those who want to improve their language ability.

K. Teacher Incentive System

This system was established in 2007; it covers a wide array of financial incentives for faculty in return for scientific activities that they carry out, and specifies the foundations for sending some instructors to international institutions to complete scientific research or learn about the latest developments in their fields of specialization (Syria).

L. Contractual Education Programs

Institutions of higher education contract with the state to develop the specialized programs that

meet the needs of plans, programs and projects, such as educating 10,000 engineers every year, up to 2010, and other education initiatives for medicine, new professions and social work (Morocco).

m. Spreading Institutional Culture

Spreading an institutional culture aims to support the participation of universities in creating institutions in general, and particularly the creation of institutions in new sectors. This takes place by incorporating institutional culture as a compulsory education unit taken by all registered students in the LMD system (Tunisia, pp. 26 - 27).

n. Educating Students about Rights and Obligations

"Registration models" for new students have been prepared; they designate the rights and obligations of students and the institution. These models are co-signed by officials from the institutions, the student and his/her parent/guardian (Bahrain, p. 57).

o. Incorporating a Help Cell into Vocational Integration of Students

This cell assists students in finding work; it advises and provides guidance to students, along with job offers and expected developments about their education. This cell is expected to become the ideal mediator for socio-economic partners and productive institutions at the local and national level. Its tasks also include developing permanent partnerships with institutions, through concluding agreements and playing the role of a strong mediator with local and national employment agencies (Tunisia, p. 79).

8. Conclusion

This chapter has allowed for reviewing 34 initiatives launched by Arab countries in an attempt to develop higher education frameworks, and perhaps solve a number of problems. These initiatives are, in some cases, inspired by international experience or based on developments witnessed during this period in the field of ICT, or from foreign offers (such as the establishment of new universities) or other developments. If we view these initiatives from the standpoint of the areas that have occupied the Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARCHE+10), we notice that these initiatives are located in the domains of educational opportunities, quality of education and (technological) management, but none falls with the area of social responsibility of the university, financing of education, governance and the inter-Arab cooperation.

III. Development Policies

This chapter reviews the most important information reported by National Reports with regard to policies adopted in order to develop higher education.

Such policies usually take several forms: regulations and legislation; strategies and plans; projects and programs. We will not outline these policies according to form, but by country, in a way that demonstrates integration among them. We will point to the extent to which each country has approved these policies and put them into practice.

1. Jordan

Strategies: producing a National Strategy for Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2007-2012 (p. 33).

2. UAE

Projects: Establishing and developing a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The state has begun establishing this framework in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education

and Scientific Research. Higher education institutions are expected to begin developing their curricula to match the classification at each level of the NQF (p. 16).

3. Bahrain

Laws: Enacting a Law on Higher Education in 2005 (p. 25).

Future Projects¹¹:

- 1) Enacting a national admission system in higher education institutions, 2) Improving investment opportunities in higher education, 3) Relying on assistance from higher education institutions as houses for expertise for the state and private sectors, 4) Following up the outputs of higher education, 5) Project on academic accreditation for higher education, 6) Coordination Committee for Academic Accreditation in GCC States project.

4. Tunisia

Laws: Enacting a Higher Education Law in Tunisia on 25 February 2008 (p. 49).

Projects: Quality Support Program. This project is based on competition among universities to win financial allocations set aside for the project. It requires universities to submit projects for quality support with clear goals, components and results for improving quality in the fields of training, financial and administrative management and in methods of administrative, financial and pedagogical management, including the acquisition of software for scientific, administrative and pedagogical management, which aims at improving quality and the administrative efficiency at the university level (pp. 32 - 36).

5. Saudi Arabia

Plans: Preparing a future plan for developing university education that includes developing all aspects of higher education (pp. 16 - 17).

Projects: Creativity and Excellence Project. Due to the importance of improving the standard of faculty in Saudi universities, the Ministry of Higher Education is completing the Creativity and Excellence Project for faculty, launched in 2006. This project comprises a group of programs, such as communications and academic leadership skills, strategic planning, thought engineering, and the use of the internet in education (p. 10).

6. Sudan

Projects: Reverse Emigration Project, Knowledge and Technology Transfer Project, Experts and Qualified People Register project, Comprehensive Census Project (p. 40).

Future projects: ICT Project. This project aims at making sources of knowledge available to students, professors and researchers. The project deals with the networked links between higher education institutions in using fiber-optic technology and providing subscriptions to international e-libraries and university indexes at Sudanese universities, and creating databases of theses. The project is expected to result in the provision of a virtual library service in addition to internet and email services. Project to develop technical education. This project aims at attracting students to technical studies and following technological developments, to meet the needs of the job market. The project covers the establishment of new technical faculties in the governorates of Sudan, support infrastructure (factories and workshops affiliated with it) and develop and modernize curricula, in order to meet the latest technological developments (pp. 46 - 47).

¹¹ For the next five or ten years.



7. Syria

Strategies: Authoring a strategy and implementation policies for the 10th Five Year Plan for the Higher Education Sector (2007 - 2012) (p. 29).

Projects: The 10th Five Year Plan for the Higher Education Sector (2006 - 2010) contained a group of projects. The largest in scale was the Project to Develop the Higher Education System. A funding agreement was signed with the European Commission in Syria in June 2007 for a four-year program, with a budget of 10 million euros. With this assistance for the project, the Ministry of Higher Education will be able to lay down a framework for creating the suitable conditions for improving quality and efficiency in the higher education sector in Syria, which will in turn help boost human resources, to guarantee economic growth and social development (p. 145).

8. Iraq

Laws: Preparation of a draft law on the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in place of Law 40 of 1988 (p. 16).

9. Oman

Strategies: Authoring a new strategy for higher education in the Sultanate of Oman (p. 48).

Projects: Comprehensive Survey of Private Higher Education Graduates in the Sultanate of Oman: The project comprises a survey of the number of private higher education graduates since the sector's inception in 1995 and up to the 2007 / 2008 academic year. The graduating classes since then are 11 in number; the project evaluates the internal and external efficiency of the education system by assessing outputs of this system in terms of skills, knowledge, aptitude and the relevance of programs and specializations for the job market. The project began in August 2008 and it is hoped to be concluded in April 2010 (pp. 50 - 53).

Statistical System for Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman: this project is one of the national e-projects being carried out by Oman's Ministry of Higher Education. It gathers and publishes detailed data on higher education at the end of every academic year; this data covers students, academics and administrators in all of Oman's higher education institutions, and Omani students studying abroad on scholarship, in addition to financial information on each higher education institution inside the country and on students after their graduation. The Unified Acceptance Center manages this system and also verifies documents and provides data to higher education institutions, government bodies and concerned research and studies centers (p. 54).

10. Kuwait

Projects: establishment of a Professional Qualifications System. This project seeks to create a system of standards that will improve the aptitude of those practicing various professions in various economic sectors in Kuwait, and boost opportunities for Kuwaiti national in the job market, by establishing a system of criteria and specifications for improving service, via the following steps: 1) design a software for professional qualifications; 2) preparing professional standards for 100 professions; 3) preparing tests for these professions; 4) program and test design, to conduct the required tests on the work force (p. 23).

Kuwait's national report contains a list of future development projects at the University of Kuwait and a second list for the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training.

11. Lebanon

Strategies: National Strategy for Education in Lebanon 2007 (pp. 76 - 193).





12. Libya

Future projects: University Campuses Project. This development project to establish and equip 23 university campuses, distributed throughout the country, will cost LD3.6 billion. Contracts for the construction of 19 campuses have been signed and work has commenced; the period of implementation ranges from 36 months for 15 campuses and 24 months for four others. Steps are now underway to conclude contracts for the construction of the remaining four campuses (p. 78).

National Project for ICT in the Higher Education Sector. The Libyan government has signed an agreement with UNESCO for this project, which will cost \$72 million. UNESCO will design and execute networks and train employees on them (p. 85).

13. Egypt

Strategies: Setting down a strategy for defining the chief objectives of the higher education system (p. 3).

Projects: In 2002, Egypt launched the Higher Education Enhancement Project (HEEP), with a loan from the World Bank, in addition to partial funding from the Egyptian government and other sources. The project's six sub-projects are: 1) a Higher Education Enhancement Project Fund (HEEPF) a regular, competitive mechanism that takes place every six months, which was established with help from universities and higher education institutions, to finance a special development program for each institution; 2) the Faculty Leadership Development Project (FLDP); 3) a project for developing information and communications technology (ICTP); 4) the Faculty of Education Project (FOEP), 5) the Egypt Technical Colleges Project (ETCP); and 6) the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Project (QAAP)¹².

Projects to develop the infrastructure of higher education. Some of these projects are being carried out in cooperation with Mediterranean countries, and with the participation of universities and Egyptian educational institutions. Others are being carried out in cooperation with France, Germany and the European Union (pp. 18 - 20).

14. Morocco

Laws: Authoring a National Covenant on Education, which represents a plan to reform the education system; this has produced a project to reform higher education by issuing Law 00 - 01, to regulate higher education and scientific research (p. 12).

Future projects: the national report mentioned that an urgent program containing a list of 23 projects in order to accelerate the implementation of reform, of which nine projects concern higher education, encouraging a spirit of initiative and distinction in secondary, preparatory and university education and in confronting horizontal problems in the education system.

15. Mauritania

Laws: Issuing Law 2006 - 2007, to regulate higher education (p. 9)

Projects: Development of Higher Education project, which was launched in 2004 and is principally directed toward the University of Nouakchott, has three major goals: 1) modernizing programs and developing faculty, setting down an accreditation system; 2) using ICT in teaching and research; and 3) institutional support for higher education institutions (p. 6).

¹² See ElMahdi Said, Mohsen. *The Impact of Reform Projects in Higher Education: The Case of Egypt* (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10) and published in this book.



16. Yemen

Strategies: Preparing a National Strategy on Higher Education and Scientific Research (p. 4).

Projects: At the beginning of 2004, work began in the framework of a cooperation project with the Dutch government (NPT Program), on: a) preparing an ICT policy for higher education; b) designing a higher education information network, comprising a central network, a separate network for each university, including search services, remote education, e-education and training end-users on the network (students, faculty, administrators) and training technicians who will run the network at the center, and universities; c) the designs were completed in 2005, with the cost of establishing and running the network and training employees and users was estimated at 20 million euros; d) a search for funding was launched and part of the amount was secured from government's budget and the Chinese and Dutch governments; and e) an ICT Center for Higher Education was established and began its work in supervising the creation of an ICT infrastructure at universities, training technicians at state universities, improving the aptitude of employees at the Center and at higher education institutions by training managers and the assistant technical staff in how to coordinate, train and follow up implementation of ICT activities at the Center and at all higher education institutions (10 in number).

Future projects: Project to Establish a Higher Education Network. Work began on the project in 2004, as part of the cooperation project with the Dutch government; the designs were completed in 2005 and the project's cost at the time estimated at 20 million euros. The project is being implemented gradually, based on the availability of funding, which has reached 10 million euros as of the end of 2008; a search for the remaining funding for the completion of the network is underway (p. 8).

Competitive Development Project. This project will be carried out with \$10 million in funding from the World Bank. A certain amount will be allocated to each state university, with each institution asked to submit its academic priority list, and submit approximately three development projects for various academic programs, in light of the priorities. The Ministry will study these projects and endorse what it deems suitable, via a joint, ministry-university committee, using clear and precise criteria that are agreed to beforehand. The project covers the development of existing academic programs or the development of new programs (p. 28).

Project to Develop Higher Education (Stage 2). The Yemeni Republic, represented by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, has obtained a \$10 million grant from the World Bank and \$570,000 from the Japanese government, to fund Stage 2 of the Project to Develop Higher Education. Currently, the project's design is being completed; it aims at improving the quality of programs that are selected at universities and maintaining the momentum for long-term reform to the funding and management of universities (p. 42).

Project to Boost the Capacity of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. This project aims at restructuring the ministry and boosting the capacities of its employees to supervise, develop and follow up work in the higher education sector (p. 42).

17. Conclusion

This brief review of the most important items reported by the National Reports shows that only one country has recently enacted a law on higher education (Mauritania, 2007). Three countries have mentioned specific laws and legislation, but they are either relatively old or remain in preparation, (This section does not mention laws related to the formation of quality assurance commissions, already reviewed in Chapter One). This means that the legislative activity aimed at modifying or amending higher education laws and systems remains very limited.

IV. Prospects for Cooperation to Establish an Arab Space for Higher Education

One of the huge challenges faced by Arab higher education is the issue of Arab cooperation in order to establish an Arab space for higher education and constitute an academic force that can face these challenges.

The authors of the National Reports were asked to put forward proposals on the opportunities and forms of Arab cooperation in order to create an Arab space for higher education; below are the highlights from these reports on this topic.

1. Proposals regarding the Forms of Arab Cooperation

1) Exchange of study grants

(Jordan, p. 95; Saudi Arabia, p. 33; Sudan, p. 51; Kuwait, pp. 92 - 93; and Libya, p. 63)¹³.

2) Exchange of training courses for students and general staff

(Jordan, p. 95; Kuwait, pp. 88 and 93).

3) Exchange of academic programs for training students

(Jordan, p. 95; Saudi Arabia, p. 166; Oman, p. 56; and Kuwait, p. 88).

4) Cooperation in research and academic fields

(Yemen, p. 50; Saudi Arabia, p. 33; Syria, p. 166; Jordan, p. 95; Kuwait, p. 93; Mauritania, p. 24)

5) Joint supervision of graduate students

(Jordan, p. 95; Kuwait, p. 93; Iraq, p. 23; Syria, p. 166; Sudan, p. 51; Mauritania, p. 24)

6) Establishing an Arab zone for scientific research

Creating an Arab zone for scientific research and innovation is the result of special attention paid to graduate studies program in an Arab space for higher education. Attention to the courses of graduate studies within this space will create a generation of young researchers in Arab countries (Syria, p. 164).

7) Exchange of periodicals, publications and books

(Jordan, p. 95; Kuwait, p. 91)

8) Sabbaticals

This proposal is related to spending sabbatical years in universities across the Arab countries. (Jordan, pp. 95 and 97; UAE, p. 25; Syria, p. 166)

9) Exchange of expertise and information among scientific research centers

(Jordan, p. 95; Libya, p. 70; Kuwait, p. 89)

10) Participation in academic conferences

(Jordan, p. 95; Kuwait, p. 89; and Syria, p. 166)

11) Establishing an Arab university database

All cooperation depends on the availability of information and data that are correct, precise, modern and homogenous; it is necessary to supervise the production of this information by a unified management, to secure this homogeneity (Jordan, p. 97; Tunisia, p. 94; UAE, p. 24; Yemen, p. 49; Oman, p. 55; Sudan, p. 51; Syria, p. 165; Mauritania, p. 24; Iraq, p. 23; Lebanon, p. 50 and Saudi Arabia, p. 33). In this regard, the establishment of a permanent Data Warehouse is proposed, to guarantee access to agreed-upon data, including a standardized methodology updated annually; this has become easier with the use of electronic databases and direct electronic communication (UAE).

¹³ These sources refer to national reports

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12) Recognizing certificates (or recognizing their equivalence) and establishing a unified Arab council or committee for degree equivalence

The basis of cooperation and integration in the Arab world in the field of higher education and socio-economic fields lies in the acknowledgment of higher degrees by various Arab countries. This recognition will help the mobility of students and academics. It is recommended to establish an Arab coordinating council on degree equivalence among all Arab states, similar to what currently exists among GCC states, in order to exchange information and expertise and set down unified bases for recognizing foreign degrees (Tunisia, p. 91; UAE, p. 24; Yemen, p. 49; Sudan, p. 50; Syria, p. 165; Kuwait, p. 89; and Saudi Arabia, p. 33). This comprises unifying the names of degrees and certificates awarded by higher education institutions or homogenizing them (Sudan, p. 49; Syria, p. 163).

13) Establishing an Arab framework for qualifications

The goal of this framework is to set down the general foundations for measuring various levels of degrees, to resemble for example the framework for qualifications set down by European states that have signed the Bologna Agreement; establishing this framework will make it easier to recognize degrees and recognize their equivalence and move from one country to another in order to follow up study or work (UAE, p. 26; and Syria, p. 163).

14) Establishing a unified Arab center for patents

(Jordan, p. 97)

15) Producing an Arab protocol on the security of information and intellectual property

(Jordan, p. 97)

16) Academic networking among Arab private and state universities

(Lebanon, p. 49)

17) Establishing joint Arab universities

This project aims at facilitating the mobility of professors and students, and can help in establishing universities that offer rare specializations (UAE, p. 26; Yemen, p. 50; Bahrain, p. 65; Mauritania, p. 24; Kuwait, p. 90; Iraq, p. 23; Syria, p. 166). In this context, the Sudan National Report proposes establishing a model university for establishing a common Arab university in the future; professors from various Arab countries would teach at this institution, which would be managed financially and administratively by individuals from various Arab countries. The Iraq National Report proposed conducting a feasibility study to establish common sub-regional universities, such as joint universities for GCC states, or a gathering of Arab Maghreb or Arab Mashreq countries (Iraq, p. 23). Libya's National Report proposed the creation of joint scientific, educational and cultural programs, such as the Learning City or graduate studies university, or Arab commission for scientific research, Arab Council for Science and Technology, or Arab city of Science and Technology (Libya, p. 67).

18) Joint education programs

This proposal regards the creation of joint education programs among existing universities, as a prelude to granting joint certificates from participating universities to students who are studying at more than one university (Yemen, p. 50; Kuwait, p. 93; Syria, p. 168).

19) Facilitating joint Arab investment in higher education

This involves efforts to create guidelines and procedures for facilitating joint Arab investment in higher education, whether through establishing common Arab higher education institutions or joint higher education programs. All Arab countries should participate, according to their available means and competitive expertise, which will lead to integration and boosting of Arab efforts (Bahrain, p. 64).

20) Publishing joint scientific periodicals

A group of professors from Arab countries assist in editing these periodicals (Sudan, p 52).

21) Authoring and implementing an Arab project on translation

Arab universities and research centers would participate in this project (UAE, p. 27; Sudan, p. 52).

22) Establishing and developing an Arab digital library

There are many sources, books and manuscripts that concern researchers from Arab countries and elsewhere. Supplying these materials and sources in digital form will facilitate access. This proposal requires linking the available digital libraries in the Arab world in an integrated fashion; it will be supervised by a central body that supports the project (UAE, p. 27).

23) Documenting successful experiences in Arab universities

This covers the dissemination of successful experiences to reap the maximum benefit and publicize them at official meetings for presidents of Arab universities or Arab higher education ministers (Bahrain, p. 65; Yemen, p. 48)

24) Establishing an Arab association for faculty at higher education institutions

This body would allow teaching faculty to exchange expertise and information as well as create the guidelines and procedures for easing their movement among higher education institutions in the Arab world, as visiting professors or in various fields of scientific research at these institutions (Bahrain, p. 64; Sudan, p. 52).

25) Exchanging information on graduates among Arab states

Disseminating and exchanging information about graduates in each field of specialization between Arab countries to boost integration between them (Bahrain, p. 65).

26) Activating the Arab network for quality assurance

(UAE, p. 24; Yemen, p. 49)

27) Quality assurance and accreditation at the Arab level

This involves establishing unified Arab committees or councils to set down the guidelines and criteria for specialized accreditation, particularly for professional programs such as medicine, engineering, education and business administration. It also comprises cooperation in producing criteria for academic accreditation for the programs that are particular to the Arab region and those in which there are no professional accreditation institutions, such as Islamic civilization and history, Arabic language and literature (UAE) and creating an Arab commission on quality assurance and accreditation (Syria, p. 163).

28) Unifying standards

This involves setting down Arab quality standards (Kuwait, p. 87), Arab cooperation in accreditation (Lebanon, p. 50), agreeing to common standards for quality and accreditation, based on international norms and standards (Sudan, p. 50), preparing a unified Arab guide to quality in higher education, which would include a common minimum level among Arab states and acceptable to all Arab states with regard to the quality of higher education. This will assist in creating a common mechanism for Arab states to recognize academic qualifications (Bahrain, p. 64).

29) Facilitating academic mobility for students

Academic mobility for student mobility is linked to the excellence of Arab universities and the existence of a basis for mutual recognition of programs and degrees; this includes boosting the movement of students among universities and spending a period of their study at other universities. This will improve the preparation of students for work in various environments or countries, in line with the globalization of work in companies and institutions (UAE, Syria).



2. Initiatives in Arab Cooperation

a. Establishing a fund to support scientific research

The Mohammed bin Rashed Al Maktoum Institution established a fund to support scientific research in 2007, and allocated 1 billion Dirhams in funding. The fund's activities cover all Arab countries and include a project for translating resource materials into Arabic, at a rate of one per day (365 books annually), and a project to support sending young people from various Arab countries for graduate studies at leading foreign universities, along with organizing various projects for scientific research (UAE, p. 18).

b. Regional ICT center

The Education Ministry in Bahrain is preparing the establishment of a regional ICT center affiliated with UNESCO, to serve Arab Gulf states and Yemen; this will aid in the development of the Arab region by exploiting the use of ICT. The Center's goals are: 1) boosting innovation, creativity and practical applications of ICT by capacity building and developing lifelong professional skills; 2) enabling the design, preparation, production and distribution of knowledge products to achieve sustainable development goals; 3) encouraging the creation and dissemination of Arab digital content; and 4) facilitating the gathering of resources, technical knowledge and private sector participation in applying ICT (Bahrain).

c. Arab information network on education (Shamaa)

The Lebanese Association for Educational Studies, a Lebanese NGO, has taken the initiative to establish this network, which will soon become an Arab institution. The network provides, through correspondents in all Arab countries and other sources, bibliographical information about all published Arab studies on education (books, articles, university dissertations and theses) in three languages (Arabic, French and English)¹⁴.

3. International-Arab Cooperation

Most National Reports noted that channels of Arab cooperation should be opened with various countries of the north and south, and particularly European Union states, North America, South America and Asia, in addition to international organizations, especially UNESCO. This would take place via academic agreements with universities and scientific institutions, and include grants to students and researchers. In this regard, the following was mentioned: 1) encouraging research centers in the Arab world to build academic ties with their European counterparts; 2) promoting networks that link Arab higher education institutions with academic libraries in Europe; 3) authoring a strategic plan to train and educate faculty in various academic disciplines with leading academic institutions in Europe; 4) supporting Arab participation in academic gatherings organized by European states (Syria); 5) following up this cooperation and subjecting it to ongoing evaluation, so that it produces the desired results (Tunisia); 6) making efforts at bilateral cooperation between universities; it would be better to see cooperation among more than three universities at the same time in academic specializations with priority status in the Arab region, and in exchanging faculty and jointly supervising doctoral dissertations and creating joint degrees; 7) Arab universities should come together in groups to take part in international research projects such as the European Framework Program for Research and Development (PCRD) (Programme Cadre pour la Recherche et le Développement) and Europe's Tempus and Erasmus, etc.; and 8) using competition with foreign universities to develop capacities at Arab universities (Tunisia, p. 98).

In this domain, namely joint programs with Europe for instance, we can distinguish between the

¹⁴ See: www.shamaanet.org



two following methods: 1) joint Arab-European programs model, which relies on one or more European providers and several beneficiaries, as is the case with some projects derived from the TEMPUS program; and 2) the single provider and single Arab partner model, which has a number of beneficiaries, as is the case with the Master's program in economic transformation, which is being set up at the University of Damascus in cooperation with Germany's Marburg Universities, which accepts students from Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Yemen, and Tunisia, in addition to a number of German students. Similar to this program, there is a Master's program in renewable energies in Egypt, with funding from the German government (Syria, p. 170).

4. Conclusion

The proposals put forward in National Reports on Arab cooperation have highlighted three conclusions: 1) a strong concern with Arab cooperation in the field of higher education; 2) there are many proposals and ideas that are being discussed (29 proposals); 3) these proposals have been put forward by all Arab countries, meaning that Arab countries appear agreed on cooperation among themselves.

If we gather these proposals into wider categories, they can be distributed among the following six areas:

a. Quality assurance and criteria

Quality assurance and accreditation at the Arab level; unifying quality standards.

b. Degree equivalence and recognition, joint classification of qualifications

Recognizing degrees (or degree equivalence); establishing an Arab council or committee to perform this task; establishing an Arab framework for qualifications.

c. Exchange

Exchange of study grants; training courses for students and staff; exchanging academic programs for training students; exchanging periodicals, bulletins and books; academic sabbaticals; exchanging information and expertise among research centers; participating in academic conferences; exchanging information among Arab countries, facilitating the academic movement of students among Arab higher education institutions.

d. Joint programs and projects

Joint supervision of graduate students; offering joint programs; creating a unified Arab center for patents; setting down an Arab protocol on information security and protection of intellectual rights; establishing an Arab zone for scientific research; creating joint Arab universities; starting joint education programs; publishing joint academic periodicals; producing an Arab project for translation and its implementation; establishing an Arab association for faculty members in higher education; and facilitating joint Arab investment in higher education.

e. Networking

Cooperation in academic and research fields; academic networking among Arab universities, both private and public; documenting successful experiences at Arab universities, making the Arab network of quality assurance agencies effective.

f. Databases

Establishing databases for Arab universities; establishing and developing an Arab digital library; establishing a database for research on education in Arab countries.

Based on the abundance of these proposals, and their focus on various levels and fields of cooperation, it is not difficult to move ahead, theoretically, with establishing an Arab space for higher education. Certainly, the European space for higher education, which started practically with the Bologna process, is based on elements similar to what is proposed here.

Creating an Arab space for higher education is one of the top goals of the Regional Arab Conference on Higher Education, but it appears to be a distant one at present. In its declaration, which was read at the end of the gathering, the Conference called for the establishment of this space, and adopted a number of the abovementioned proposals, However, the measures and plans for creating this space remain unknown. Perhaps it would be better to determine the obstacles and difficulties that work against the establishment of this space, and describe and analyze previous experiences with cooperation, in order to benefit from these lessons, avoid negative aspects and accentuate positive ones.

V. Main Challenges

Arab countries have scored achievements, launched many initiatives, authored policies and legislation, carried out projects and planned for new projects for the next five to ten years. However, “taking stock” a decade after the 1998 Conference on Higher Education tells us that higher education in 2008 continues to face many challenges, which require huge efforts if they are to be successfully overcome. We should also bear in mind that Arab countries have disparate conditions when it comes to the magnitude of these challenges and ability to confront them. In this chapter we rely on the National Reports and attached statistical information. However, since these reports do not necessarily cover all of the topics of the Conference, we will also rely on a number of papers that were submitted to the Conference, and on some other sources.

1. Educational Opportunities

The National Reports attribute the existing problems of educational opportunities to the fact that population and social demand for education are quickly growing, at a faster rate than the enrollment capacity of higher education institutions. This problem becomes intractable in countries with large populations, high population growth rates, or a low level of economic resources (See Box 5 - 1).

a. Unsatisfactory enrollment rates in higher education

We have already mentioned that the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in Arab countries remains at around 22%. Hence, the Arab region is ranked sixth out of the world’s eight regions (See Figure 5 -1). We have already noted that ten out of 19 Arab countries continue to have rates lower than 30%.

Box 5 - 1 Factors that inhibit the growth of higher education opportunities

Egypt: “The population increase in Egypt is one of the leading challenges to the development process. Despite the efforts made to limit this problem, the average population growth rate remains high. The population increase reduces work opportunities available and is considered one of the most important reasons for unemployment and the failure of enrollment rates to reach satisfactory levels” (P. 17).

Yemen: “The sharp pressure on higher education institutions is attributed to the rise of social demand for higher education, and is also connected to the population growth increase, especially with the inability to meet the demand of all applicants,

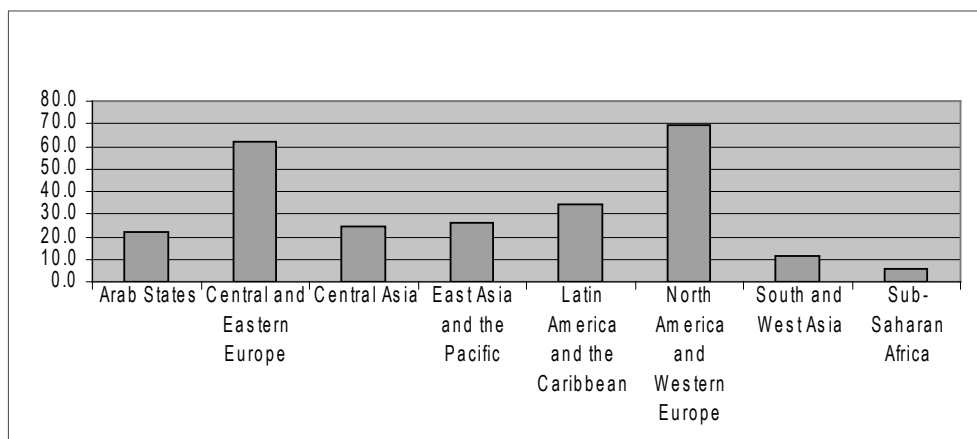
due to limited enrollment capacity. According to this capacity, public universities are permitted an average of around 55 thousand students, while the number of students in 12th grade (scientific and humanities tracks) in 2007 stood at 178.4 thousand, meaning that students enrolled in state universities, according to their absorptive capacities, form around only 30% of the students registered in the last year of high school” (p. 14 - 15).

Kuwait: “The continuous increase in the outputs of public education, the wide gap between aspirations and conditions on the ground, the increasing trend toward higher education in general, at rising rates that move more quickly than the possible growth in enrollment capacity or space available to higher education institutions” (p. 25).

Syria: “The increase in the number of students passing high school greatly exceeds the increase dictated by expectations based on population growth rates; the number of passing students in 2008 rose to 169,890, compared to 71,060 students in 1999, an increase of 139% in ten years” (p. 22).

Morocco: “Developing higher education faces a severe problem: the enrollment capacity is insufficient, which is a huge challenge, linked to the need to provide satisfactory conditions in order to confront the huge increase in the number of students in the coming years. As for the 19 university dormitories’ enrollment capacity, which stands at 35,000 beds, only 35% of current students can be accepted, even though additional supply provided by private universities in recent years; we should mention that only nine university dormitories contain university restaurants” (p. 19).

Figure 5 - 1: Gross Enrollment Ratio in Higher Education, by Region (2007)



Source: UIS



b. Poor rates of equality and equity in educational opportunities

If the Gender Parity Index (GPI) is positive in the general total of Arab countries, and positive in 11 out of 17 countries about which gender-related information is available (See Part 1), then this index remains negative in six countries (Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Syria and Yemen), even though Egypt and Syria have come close to reaching gender parity.

However, if the GPI is positive, this is not the end of the story. If the GPI rises above 1, it means there is a drop-off in males seeking higher education; this is a problem in many Arab countries, where the percentage of males is only 30 - 40% at times. A study submitted to the Conference demonstrated that this represents a worrying trend, since it accumulates in the pre-university education¹⁵.

Meanwhile, the social inequality of educational opportunities is common, and has become sharp in the poorest countries (Box 5- 2). One paper submitted to the ARCHE+10 contained statistical evidence about an Arab country¹⁶.

Moreover, one of the papers submitted to the Conference showed that admission policies are usually centralized and seek to provide equality, but usually lead to two results, depending on the conditions of the countries: 1) the lack of equitable distribution, since students with varying conditions are subject to unified criteria, 2) a rise in the number of students that exceeds the institutions' capacity, and excluding a group of students whose grade averages fall below the required level¹⁷.

Box 5 - 2: Social Inequality in Educational Opportunities

Morocco: Most of the differences observed in higher education, whether in terms of gender, social groups, or rural-urban populations, are due to the differences in the spread of primary and secondary education (p. 19).

Yemen: The percentage of students from urban areas who obtain a university education is more than six times higher than the rate for rural inhabitants, while female students in higher education focus on their presence in educational areas that have a lower social status and economic return (p. 19).

c. A lack of balance in enrollment among specializations

Enrollment in the humanities and social sciences is predominant; their students constitute about two-thirds of the total, compared to less than one-third who are enrolled in pure and applied sciences (Figure 5 - 2). Among the first group, students are fairly balanced in terms of education and literature/arts and business administration/social sciences (Figure 5 - 3). See also Box 5 - 3.

¹⁵ See: Fatma Abdulla and Natasha Ridge. *Where are all the Men? Gender Participation and Higher Education in the United Arab Emirates*. (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10, and published in this book).

¹⁶ See: Mona El Baradei. *Access, Equity and Competitiveness: The Case of Higher Education in Egypt*. (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10, and published in this book).

¹⁷ See: Rafica Hammoud. *Admission Policies and Procedures in Arab Universities*. (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10, and published in this book).



Figure 5 - 2: Distribution of Students in Higher Education, by Broad Fields of Study (2008)

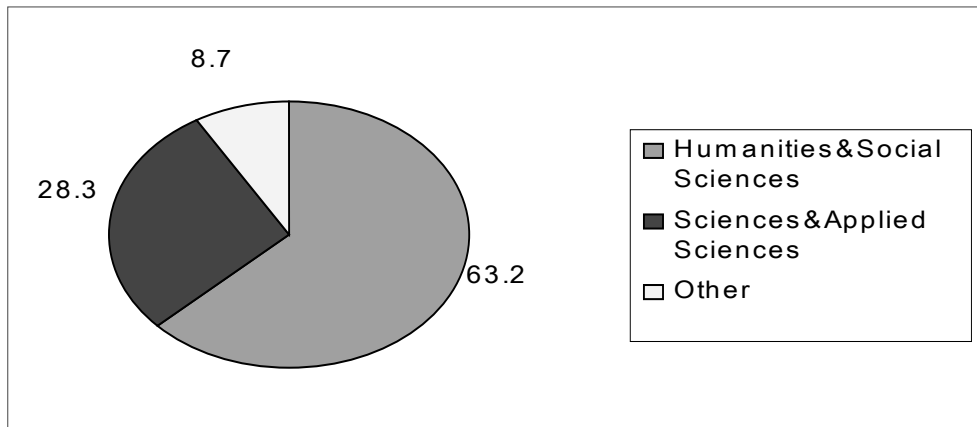
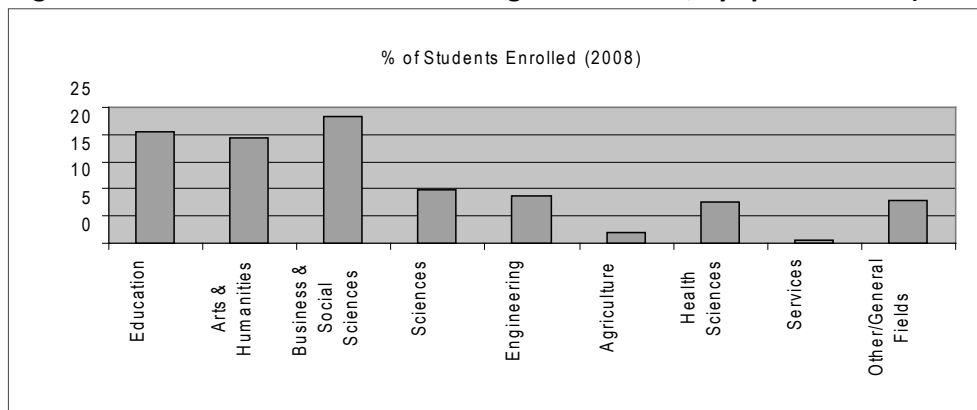


Figure 5 - 3: Distribution of Students in Higher Education, by Specialization (2008)



Box 5 - 3 "Scientific Desertification"

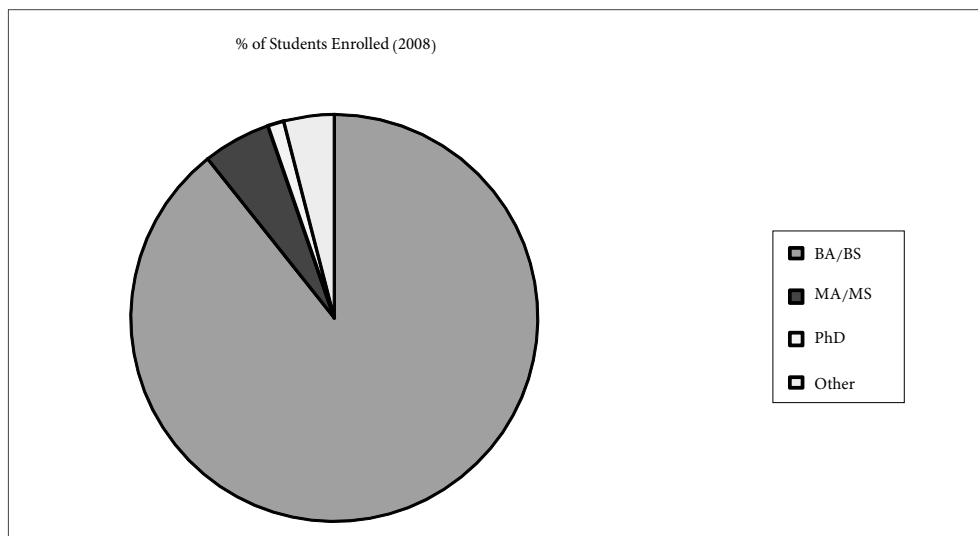
Palestine: The field of human sciences has the highest number of students; education programs covered more than one-third of students enrolled in higher education, due to inputs to higher education three-quarters of which are from the literary branches. In addition, these specializations overlap in universities, reflecting a lack of coordination and planning upon their creation (p. 11).

Syria: Between 1999 and 2008, the number of students passing high school in the literature track increased by 286%, compared to 43% for the scientific track (p. 26).

d. Small Size of the Graduate Studies

Arab universities remain teaching-oriented; they have failed to make progress in developing graduate studies. Master's degree students form only 5.4% of the total (this rate stood at 4.9% in 1998), while Doctoral students make up only 1.3% (0.9% in 1998) (See figure 5 - 4). Out of five million students, with identifiable degrees, there were (in 2008) 63,900 students enrolled in a Doctoral program and 273,200 students in Master's degree programs.

Figure 5 - 4: Distribution of Students in Higher Education, by Degree



e. Gap between enrollment and graduation

No statistical information is available about the distribution of students based on years of study, or rates of graduation. However, the evidence from National Reports indicates a gap between the numbers of enrolled students and graduates (Box 5 - 4). This is due to many reasons, such as students with unsuitable specializations (whether because of the poor choice of the student or the centralized system of admission), discouraging educational conditions and quality, or enrollment in university due to social pressures, etc. Thus, first-year courses at some faculties are overcrowded with new and repeating students. This reflects a low internal efficiency of university education and inflates enrollment to unrealistic levels.

f. The non-state sector's share of providing educational opportunities remains limited

We mentioned above that the non-state higher education sector represents 36.2% of the total. In fact, these institutions today remain unable to absorb more than 11% of students, as shown in Figure 5 - 5. This is calculated for 5.023 million students. The share of females is 44%, compared to 51% in the state education sector. If this sector's share of the total number of students stands at 11%, its share drops to 10% at the Master's and Doctoral degree levels; Figure 5 - 6 shows this low quantitative share.

Box 5 - 4: Staying at University

Morocco: Rates of repetition and failure to graduate from higher education reach 17% in all tracks and 30% in tracks with open access (p. 18),

Lebanon: The high numbers of students in the first year at open faculties, and the sharp drop in graduation rates at the Lebanese University, (are due) to the acceptance of large numbers of students in the first year in open faculties, the drop in promotion to the second year, the lack of available educational programs, limited resources, the absence of a sound educational environment, the lack of a guidance and orientation system for students, and the drop in educational attainment. In general, and despite the exceptions, higher education lacks ability and readiness to offer support services to students that improve the chances of their enrollment and pursuing their studies (pp.23, 28).

Libya: The drop in graduation rates indicates a series of key problems, connected to the quality of instruction and the readiness of students for education. Estimates by Garyounis University on the ratio of graduates to enrolled students dropped to 3.9% in economics and engineering, 6.5% in sciences and high rates of 24% in letters (p. 38).

Figure 5 - 5: Distribution of Students in Higher Education, by Sector

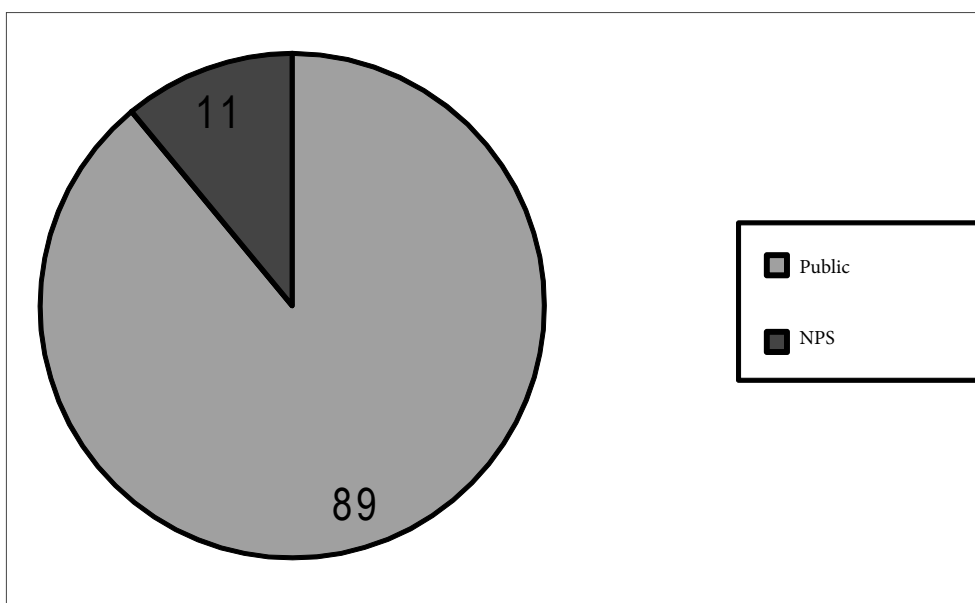
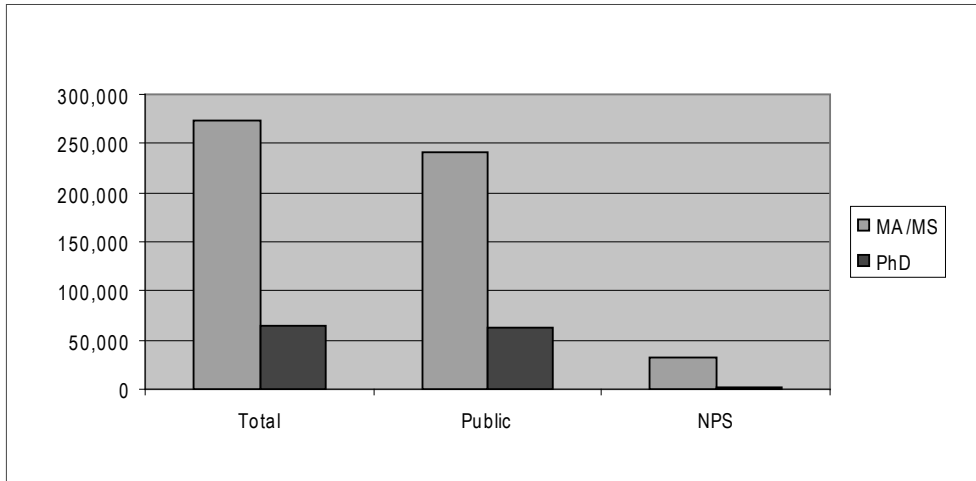


Figure 5 - 6: Distribution of Students in Master's and Doctoral Programs, by Sector



2. Quality of Higher Education

The challenges related to the quality of higher education are wider and more profound than those related to educational opportunities. The solution to problems in terms of opportunities (quantitative) has often exacerbated problems related to quality; several National Reports acknowledged that quantitative growth had taken place, at the expense of the quality of education (Yemen, p. 14; Jordan, p. 26; and Syria, pp. 5 and 14).

Below, we outline various aspects of the qualitative challenges, taken from National Reports and their statistical appendices¹⁸.

a. Student density: many students and few facilities

Naturally, quality in education drops with an increase in students that exceeds the amount of resources and enrollment capacity. This covers lecture halls, seats, laboratories and libraries, etc. not only in terms of their number/amount, but also in terms of their actual condition, since more frequent use and little maintenance reduce the age of material used and exhausts them more rapidly (Box 5 - 5).

Box 5 - 5: Many Students and Few Facilities

Palestine: Facing this pressure, universities began a policy of accepting more than their enrollment capacity, seeking a reduction of per student costs; they established parallel education as a way to increase fees and tuition; moreover, other universities began to appear and the number of applications for licensing private higher education institutions grew. This year, two non-state universities were licensed, along with two independent non-state faculties (pp. 10 - 11).

¹⁸ For more details on quality in higher education in Arab countries, see: El-Amine, Adnan (2009), «Higher Education in Arab Countries: Issues and Future Prospects», *First Report on Cultural Development*, Arab Thought Foundation (second edition), pp 103 - 128

Mauritania: There is a clear lack of resources, in terms of quantity and quality, an absence of a university textbook prepared on the basis of curricula; this is a problem that continues to force students to take courses in the manner of summaries dictated by the teacher (p. 13).

Yemen: The problems become more acute when it comes to infrastructure, libraries, and learning resources at regional universities, whose infrastructure remains incomplete; this is despite the great strides taken in this field, and particularly at Dhamar, Ibb, and Hodeidah Universities. The problem becomes even more acute at five new state universities, whose establishment was mandated in 2008, before the huge drop in oil prices and the global financial crisis. In general, expansion in building universities, despite the importance of quantitative expansion, will have a negative impact on improving quality, if not accompanied by an increase in the financial expenditures required by expansion (p. 17).

b. Weak academic standards for general education graduates

There are complaints about the weak abilities of graduates from pre-university level, especially in English and math, in addition to their weakness in critical learning and thinking skills, which reflects negatively on their university attainment (UAE, p. 49; Oman, p. 27).

c. The quality of programs and curricula

Some National Reports complained about the weakness of educational curricula and their unsuitability in terms of time scale; there were also complaints that they had not been upgraded, to match scientific and technical progress (Libya, p. 24); some conference papers described the curricula in a number of specializations, pointing out their weak points¹⁹.

d. Shortcomings of faculty and their need for professional development

The challenges relating to faculty hinge around the lack of teachers holding the required degrees and specializations in sufficient numbers, as shown in Box 5 - 6.

Only a few reports mentioned problems in the educational standard or aptitude of the faculty. The implications of student density on faculty members were unclear in the reports.

Conference papers put forward a number of items that require consideration of the issue of quality. These include university pedagogy²⁰, the weakness of incorporating graduate degree holders arriving from abroad into existing academic systems²¹. This weakness indicates the gap between foreign and local universities in terms of concepts and criteria related to quality and the university climate. Moreover, one of the papers showed that efforts made by Arab states with regard to a professional track for teaching faculty members are insufficient, in terms of quantity and quality. There is a critical need for a radical change in the existing conditions, if faculty members want to play an effective role in confronting the challenge of quality higher education in Arab countries²².

¹⁹ See: Awashriya ASaid. *Higher Education Curricula in Algeria: Indicators of Fragility and Means of Improving their Quality. The Case of Psychology, Education and Orthophony*. (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10, and published in this book).

²⁰ See: Nada Moghaizel-Nasr. *Le Laboratoire de pédagogie universitaire de l'Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth*. (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10, and published in this book).

²¹ See: Rami Ayoubi, Hiba Massoud, Hanan Al Maghout, *Culture Shock or Shocking Culture: An Exploration of the Main Obstacles Encountering Syrian Newly Returned Academic Staff from Abroad*. (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10, and published in this book).

²² Ramzi Salame. *Career Path of Higher Education Teaching Personnel in the Arab States and the Quality Challenges*. (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10 and published in this book).



Box 5 - 6: Shortcomings in Faculty

Libya: There is a deficit in the number of teaching faculty in some science specializations and specializations that are new worldwide (p. 36).

Palestine: Doctoral degrees are held by 37% of the teaching faculty at Palestinian universities, and more than 50% hold a Master's degree (Higher Education Database, 2006). The higher the academic degree, the lower the percentage of females represented; it should also be noted that the percentage of non-full time members of the teaching faculty approaches 45% (p. 10).

Oman: Relying on professors from abroad is a form of challenge, since it has a negative impact on the continuity of teaching faculty at universities, and does not guarantee the ongoing development of programs (UAE, pp. 9 - 10) and in the Sultanate of Oman, it is believed that this continuing deficit will become dangerous in the future, with the lack of attention paid to professional development of the teaching corps (p. 27).

d. Failure to meet the requirements of the economy / Unemployment

This was mentioned by many National Reports; the complaint focused on the lack of planning student enrollment based on the needs of the labor market, i.e. the central bureaucracy must be responsible for confronting this challenge (Box 5 - 7).

Box 5 - 7: Failure to Meet the Requirements of Development

Most higher education institutions are unable to meet all of the needs of the labor market, because the relationship between the world of business and universities is either severed or weak (Syria, p. 25; Libya, p. 24).

The lack of relevance between students' specializations and the needs of the job market result from ad hoc admission policies at universities, which do not take the labor market's needs into consideration, and this leads to inflated numbers of university graduate who are unemployed (Jordan, pp. 25 - 26; Kuwait, p. 26).

The sharp crisis, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, indicates unemployment, masked unemployment, and emigration (Lebanon, p. 41).

The percentage of employment of those who graduated in 2003 /2004 was estimated at 14%, 18 months after graduation. This rate differed among higher education institutions, as 14.7% of the total were from university graduates in general, while the rate did not exceed 7.5% of graduates from the Higher Institute for Islamic Research and Studies (Mauritania, p. 13).

Strengthening partnership and cooperation between universities and their economic surroundings helps produce and develop specialized programs that suit economic needs and help students enter the job market and avoid unemployment (Tunisia, p. 30).





e. The weakness of research structures and culture

There is a general acknowledgement by the National Reports of the weakness of research structure and paucity of research opportunities. This takes several forms: an expansion in programs (particularly at the graduate level) with fewer research requirements such as laboratories and technicians; a weakness of a research culture among public and private sector institutions; weak links between current research projects in universities and socio-economic development plans and issues in productive economic sectors; a paucity of laboratories, modern equipment, materials, books, resources, periodicals and means of publication; weak contact with regional and international science institutions; weak financing and expenditure on research; the lack of clear guidelines for managing and assessing research; the lack of support for research, consulting and participation in conferences by some higher education institutions; a high number of teaching hours for academic faculty; the emigration of qualified, educated people abroad; the failure to provide an enabling environment and build researchers' capacities (Syria, p 28; UAE, p. 11; Oman, pp. 26 - 27; Sudan, pp. 19 - 20; Yemen, p. 15; Palestine, pp. 16 - 17; Libya, p. 24; Mauritania, p. 13; and Morocco, p. 19).

Two papers submitted to the Conference, on research conditions in the social science fields, showed that national guidelines for supporting and encouraging such research are weak, and that research activity has shifted from universities to civil society organizations, as concerns dictated by international organizations funding this research win out²³.

f. The absence of institutional assessment and weakly-rooted quality assurance procedures

Traditions associated with assessing higher education institutions have yet to become strongly rooted. A number of Arab countries (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Tunisia, etc.) have launched activities in the context of accreditation and quality assurance. These activities cover producing self-assessment reports and setting down development plans on their basis; these countries have established quality assurance units at universities. However, these activities have remained "trial" projects, with a somewhat formal character. They are taken on by "specialists" in quality or "full-timers" in this field; or, they are dependent on certain (temporary) financing projects. Although ten countries have established structures for quality assurance and accreditation, none has become an independent institution with moral authority and a significant impact on state education institutions, and their criteria do not become an intrinsic part of university life, or in classes, or in the management of higher education, etc. In many cases, they have become part of the bureaucratic system, in terms of work mechanisms, and at times they have become bureaucratic arms for monitoring quality at private sector institutions and punishing institutions that are violating the regulations in force. International organizations aprograms (like Tempus, UNDP, etc.) have undertaken some activities, and produced considerable amounts of evidence, reports and documents, or translated them. However, there is no strong evidence about the impact of these activities and documents on the extent to which the quality assurance system is rooted in the higher education system as a whole. This evidence was not presented by either the National Reports or a recent feasibility study by UNESCO on 13 Arab countries²⁴. This evidence

²³ See: Jacques Kabanji. *The Status of social scientific Research in Lebanon in a «Globalized» Context: Attempt to Understand its Components, Conditions and limitations*. (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10 and published in this book).

Sari Hanafi. *The Social Sciences Research in the Arab East Dilemmas of the Research Centers outside the University*. (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10 and published in this book).

²⁴ See: El-Amine, Adnan, and Salame, Ramzi (review) (2008). *Feasibility Study on Methods of Joint Work on*



did not appear in regional or local reports, either²⁵.

g. Differences between public and private education sectors

This section compares state and non-state sectors, through three indicators:

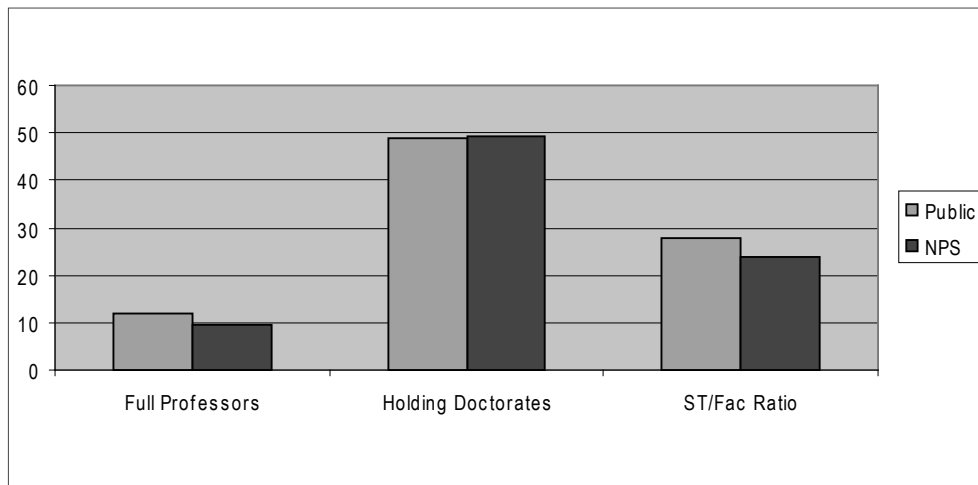
1) Teaching staff

Figure 5 - 7 shows that there are no significant differences between the two sectors in terms of percentage of doctoral degree holders or share of professors, and the rates are weak in both cases. Perhaps their similarity is due to the fact that private universities rely on professors from the state education sector, during their careers or after retirement.

2) Student to teacher ratio

The same Figure shows the students to professor ratio is better in the private sector, a natural result of overcrowded conditions in the state sector, to which we have referred previously.

Figure 5 - 7: Percentage of Doctoral Degree Holders and Share of Full Professors; Student to teacher ratio in both State and Non-state Sectors



Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Arab Countries, Beirut, UNESCO regional office for Arab states.

²⁵ The UNDP has authored a number of regional reports on the results of a project entitled Enhancement of Quality Assurance and Institutional Planning in Arab Universities. Each report deals with a program that has been assessed. These reports provide a diagnostic view of the given program, but do not indicate its impact on the ground. Although the “impact” of the Higher Education Enhancement Project (HEEP) has been assessed in Egypt, the paper presented to the ARCHE+10 about this assessment showed that the process took place based on normative-referenced evaluation, i.e. a test of the degree to which the objectives that the project has identified for itself are met, based on an opinion survey. See Mohsen Elmahdy Said, *The Impact of Reform Projects in Higher Education: The Case of Egypt*. (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10 and published in this book).

Figure 5 - 8: Distribution of Non-teaching Units, by Topic

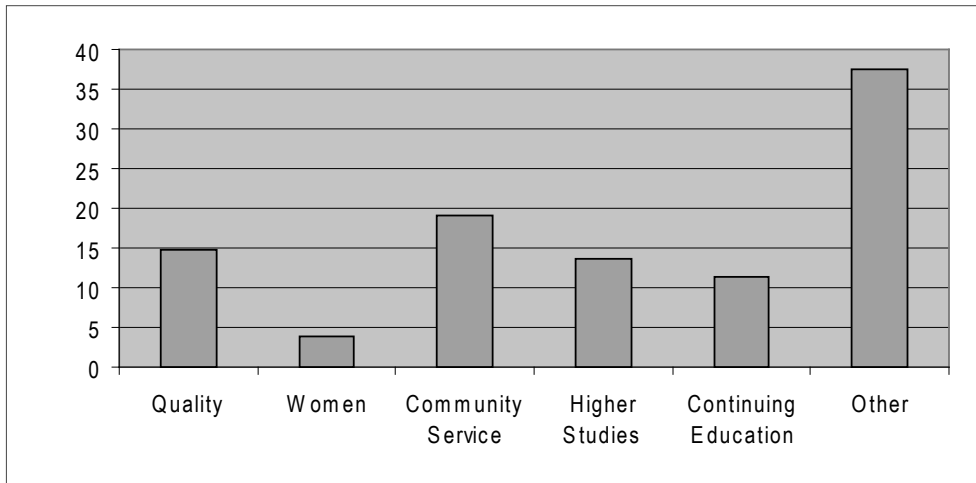
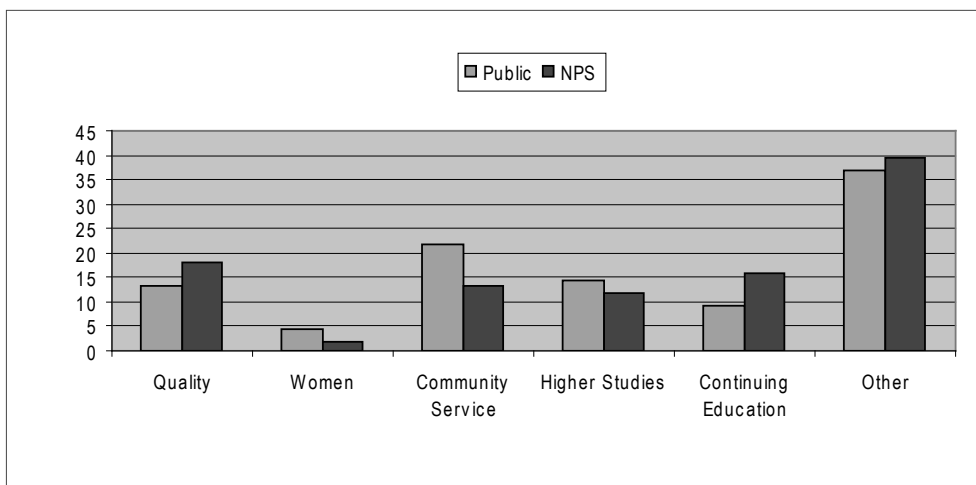


Figure 5 - 9: Percentage of Non-teaching Units, by Topic and Sector



3) Non-teaching units

Non-teaching units are centers or faculties established with an interest in specific topics that the university believes require care and support. A number of faculty members usually join these units, but they do not comprise registered students, since these units do not award degrees, even if students can take part in activities based on their interests. These units usually denote quality, as they are a horizontal expansion that enriches university life in various ways.

Information was gathered on these units at 250 universities. We found that they contain 1,167 non-teaching units, with a mean of 4.7 per university. These units are distributed among various topics, but those can be classified with clarity fall into five categories: quality,

women, community service, graduate studies and continuing education. Figure 5 - 8 shows that the biggest portion lie in community service (19% of the total), and women's studies centers have the lowest share (3.8%). The difference between the public sector and non-public sector (NPS) appears in two forms. The first is the mean number of these units in a single university (six in the state sector and three in the non-state sector). This indicates that the non-state sector is heading toward restricting its activity to teaching, which is evident in the difference in quality, in favor of the government sector. The second item involves the fact that the state sector contains more community service, graduate studies and women's studies units than the private sector. It is worth noting that the non-state sector includes more quality units than the state sector. Perhaps we can attribute this to the conditions imposed on the non-state sector when it comes to quality control. We have mentioned above that national accreditation commissions in Arab countries remain oriented toward quality control, which means that the difference here is administrative in nature, and not necessarily an indicator of quality (Figure 5 - 9).

3. Social Responsibility in Higher Education

This issue was one of the core issues at the Conference (Box 5 - 8). Papers submitted to the Conference raised a number of related issues as well as various ideas about the problems that universities face in assuming this responsibility: disputes resulting from a disparity between culture acquired in the university and traditional social values²⁶, and the weakness of participation in forming civic and political orientations among university students²⁷. Other papers put forward models of how universities can become involved in community affairs and exit their closed environment²⁸.

Box 5 - 8: Social responsibility at university in the Conference Announcement

The question of the social responsibility of universities is currently being addressed at a global level and Arab states are, perhaps, suffering the most in this field. Furthermore, some of the Arab states have, in recent years, witnessed internal crises and conflicts or challenges related to, among others, freedom, democracy, governance, human rights, and terrorism.

Higher education provides society with graduates equipped with a number of values and skills as well as with the necessary general knowledge to play their different social roles, both through their occupational function and through their broader status as citizens. In this context, the ARCHE+10 explores the extent of the contribution of higher institutions as a whole, through all programs, to the dissemination of general and social culture in terms of values, knowledge and skills related to citizenship, tolerance, the acceptance of others, ethics, sexual and

²⁶ See: Meriem Bouzeid-Sababou. *Les universitaires tourage, vers la normalisation des institutions traditionnelles ou leur réforme?* (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10, and published in this book).

²⁷ See: Nadine Sika. *Private Universities in Egypt: Are they Venues for Democratic Attitudes and Behavior?* (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10, and published in this book).

Moahad Rahal, *The Lebanese University and the Issue of Social Integration: An Analytical Survey Study.* (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10, and published in this book).

²⁸ See: Cynthia Myntti, Rami Zurayk, Mounir Mabsout. *Beyond the Walls: The American University of Beirut Engages its Communities.* (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10, and published in this book).

social discrimination, as well as in terms of intellectual skills. It also engages with the role played by higher education institutions as cultural spaces that construct bridges between academia and society. Furthermore, the ARCHE+10 addresses community service programs related to, for instance, the contribution to health care or literacy campaigns, concern for the environment and the participation of faculties in public councils, social programs or in voluntary organizations. Alternatively, higher education encompasses programs that are specifically orientated towards the training of “social professions” and towards the training of academic elites in a number of human and social fields, as is the case for the training programs organized for teachers, managers, media professionals, historians, linguists, philosophers, sociologists, economists, psychologists, etc. It must be noted that these disciplines generally attract more students while attracting the minimum resources and usually face many problems at the qualitative level compared to science and technology studies. Worldwide, serious concern is being expressed about the deterioration of higher education in the fields of human and social sciences, which has driven some regions and states to establish special strategies for the development of teaching and research in these fields. From this perspective, the ARCHE+10 involves the status of human and social sciences programs in the Arab States in terms of teaching or in terms of research, resources, methods, contents, orientations and outcomes²⁹.

4. Management and Financing

a. Lack of a satisfactory level of quality control in private education

The diversity witnessed by higher education is a big challenge to controlling admission criteria, the outputs of education, and systems of student transfer (UAE, p. 10). Most notably, higher education faces constraints related to the rules upon which private education works. One of the papers submitted to the Conference noted that despite the relative spread and development in systems and rules for licensing and follow-up in many Arab countries, we find that these rules are not applied in many cases, while there are shortcomings in follow-up. Likewise, the rules and regulations that are discussed at the Arab level should be developed and modernized to keep up with regional and international developments³⁰. Some examples of the inability to control quality at times are the “higher education zones,” as in the UAE. A number of institutions do not abide by the standards that have been adopted, which prompted the regional government in Dubai to create its own control unit, while free zones in Ras al-Khaima and Sharjah continue to operate independently (UAE, p. 30).

b. Dispersion and weakness of guidelines for managing higher education

The National Reports complained about the many bodies that oversee higher education and the dispersion of efforts and non-optimal use of financial resources (Oman, p. 25). They also complained about old systems governing private higher education and the systems that govern state universities (Lebanon, p. 33), the bureaucratic and desk management of universities, which often delays academic work, especially in terms of research and developing knowledge production programs (Libya, p. 56).

²⁹ ARCHE+10, Conference Guide, pp 12 - 13

³⁰ Abdel Bagi A.G. Babiker. *Licensing and Supervision of Private Higher Education Institutions in the Arab States*. (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10, and published in this book).

c. Low rate of expenditures on university education and difficulty of securing sources of financing

This is a general issue about which most Arab countries have complaints; it results in various consequences, at several levels, particularly educational opportunities and quality of education (Box 5 - 9).

Box 5 - 9: Financing Problems

Jordan: The low rate of expenditure on university education and the difficulty in securing sources of financing that are sufficient and durable have led to a growing indebtedness on the part of universities and their inability to carry out development strategies according to specific time-tables; they are unable to meet a minimum level of quality requirements, such as increasing the number of teaching faculty, maintaining a minimum number of qualified staff, halting their emigration, supplying the needed advanced teaching equipment, increasing allocations for scientific research, intensifying student scholarship programs, and completing infrastructure works (p. 24).

Sudan: The lack of financing has led to the following consequences: development projects at higher education institutions have stalled; teaching faculty have turned in a less-than-adequate performance; professors have left the country in increasing numbers or left to work at institutions inside the country; faculty have resorted to moonlighting to support themselves; a suitable educational and research environment for students has deteriorated due to the lack of resources for their training in various fields (pp. 20, 22).

Syria: The biggest challenge is represented by financing, which in higher education is considered a primary tool for confronting other challenges, particularly horizontal expansion and the increase in admission rates at educational institutions (pp 29 - 30).

Oman: The total estimated expenditure on the education sector reached only 13% of total public expenditure. Alternative sources of financing must be located in investment in higher education, by having those who are able pay educational fees or create a special fund for funding higher education (p. 24).

Egypt, Yemen: The shortfall in financial resources is a chronic problem. Despite the increase in allocations by the state for higher education, they are still considered insufficient (Egypt, p. 16; Yemen, p. 16).

Palestine: The reduction in state support for covering the operating expenses of higher education institutions has a negative impact on several aspects, such as: accepting students on the basis of "parallel education," where the student pays higher fees; the irregularity in paying teacher salaries; the use of savings funds to secure continuity; "false" reductions in per student costs, by not increasing the number of faculty to suit the increase in student numbers; reducing expenditures on libraries; increasing the burdens on faculty members; increasing the number of non-full time staff; reducing expenditure on attending academic conferences and reducing scientific research budgets; and reducing opportunities for scholarships abroad, etc. (pp. 10, 13).



5. Conflicts and Occupation

a. Iraq

The security, political and economic ramifications of the war led to looting educational institutions and targeting professors and a number of prominent academic figures, some of them emigrated, while the rest live in fear and move around only in order to teach. Meanwhile, students have encountered conditions of psychological and domestic instability due to the threats, which has hampered their ability to attend classes regularly and led to deterioration in the quality of higher education. These are examples from a long list of problems (Iraq, p. 21). One of the Conference papers presented statistical reports on the impact of war on the faculty's research performance in Iraq³¹.

b. Lebanon

The Lebanese university and private universities have been affected by the political conditions the country experienced in from 1975 - 1990, particularly in developing human resources or retaining them, amid the loss of competent staff and their emigration. The negative aspects of this phenomenon were felt primarily at the Lebanese University, with the rise in the average age of the faculty, due to the limited opportunities for full-time employment or contracting with new professors (Lebanon, p. 15).

c. Palestine

The National Report mentions that the course of research has been affected by the Israeli military occupation, with the shutting of higher education institutions and research institutes, and ongoing attempts by the Israeli authorities to impede their development (Palestine, p. 12).

6. Social Issues

a. Brain drain

Jordan's National Report indicated that emigration by the work force in recent decades has had a positive effect on the national economy, thanks to remittances sent by those abroad, and a fall in unemployment rates. However, it has been noticed in the last decade that the emigration by these workers has begun to include growing numbers of faculty members with high aptitude and rare specializations, due to their low local salaries and benefits, compared to other countries (p. 78). Tunisia's National Report noted the government's efforts to benefit from the large numbers of human resources that are abroad, especially in Europe (Tunisia p. 67).

b. Unemployment

Jordan's National Report said the unemployment rate among high school degree holders is usually higher than the national average (Jordan, p. 80). In Mauritania, the National Report said that it is not easy for graduates to enter the job market, with the rate not exceeding 14.7%, and that growing numbers of graduates have begun to form alumni leagues that search for work, and sometimes these groups include people with high qualifications, graduated from foreign universities (Mauritania, p. 21). Meanwhile, unemployment in Sudan has risen in the last decade, with the average for 2001 estimated at 15% (Sudan, pp. 16 - 17).

c. Social life

This issue was raised in Lebanon's National Report, with regard to areas of social mix for university students in Lebanon over the last ten years. It said there was a low number of organized activities and joint programs among universities and of interactive professional activities among the

³¹ Sawsan Shakir Majeed. *Impact of Crises on Scientific and Research Activities of Faculty Members: a Comparative Study (Iraq and Jordan)*. (Paper submitted to ARCHE+10, and published in this book).



teaching faculty, and limited opportunities for providing students with knowledge and values of living together and building convictions and practices associated with these knowledge and values (p. 40).

7. Arab Cooperation/Arab Space

a. Mobility among Arab universities

Out of 3.76 million students enrolled in Arab universities, information about their nationalities was available; 3.6 million are citizens, or 96.3%. Meanwhile, there are 109,000 students from another Arab country (2.9%), while non-Arabs account for 28,816 students, or 0.8%. This data shows clearly that student mobility among Arab countries is practically absent, while student mobility from other regions to Arab countries is practically non-existent.

It is interesting that (non-national) Arab students are not present primarily in Egypt, which has traditionally been the biggest recipient of students. The biggest numbers of non-national students are in the following countries, in order: Jordan (22,600), UAE (19,800), Lebanon (19,600) and Egypt (12,000). We have reservations about these figures, since not all universities in these countries responded to the questionnaires, and not all universities that responded provided complete information about the nationalities of students.

Likewise, the mobility of faculty takes the same pattern, with a slight increase in favor of both Arab and non-Arab professors: 7.3% are from other Arab countries and 2.8% are non-Arabs. Saudi Arabia is the leader here (32.5% are non-Saudi Arab professors and 6.2% are foreigners), followed by the UAE.

In fact, the picture is dramatically different in the UAE, which has a high percentage of Arab professors (48%) and non-Arab professors (43%), compared to very low levels of Emirati professors (only 9%). Likewise, the distribution of students in this country is different than the pattern mentioned above: 33.8% of the total are Arab students and 14.4% are foreigners, compared to 51.8% Emirati students. We have reservations about these figures as well.

b. Establishing Arab quality control organizations and networks

There are no Arab (regional) agencies for quality assurance as of yet. This is despite the decisions taken in this regard at conferences of higher education ministers, particularly the 11th Conference of ministers responsible for higher education and scientific research in the Arab world (Dubai, 5-6 November 2007), which recommended support for the idea of establishing an Arab institution for quality assurance of programs; it also recommended publishing the regional report prepared by the UNESCO Beirut office on the topic, and distributing it on a wide scale in the Arab world³². With regard to networking, the Arab Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) has been established. It is an NGO that works in cooperation with the international network INQAHEE and in partnership with the Association of Arab Universities. Internet users might locate a second Arab network, entitled ARQAANE³³.

c. Recognizing degrees

In 1978, an agreement on degree recognition among Arab countries was signed by 14 countries (out of 22). It is interesting that this agreement has not been re-evaluated, despite the profound

³² The Association of Arab Universities established the Council on Quality assurance and Accreditation in the Arab World (2007), and the available information does not indicate that it has become an effective organization.

³³ «The Arab Quality Assurance and Accreditation Network for Education (ARQAANE) is an international non-profit independent association established in July 2007 with the fundamental objective of raising the quality of education in the Arab world. http://www.aqaan.org/HTMLWebsite/index_ar.html

changes that higher education has witnessed in these countries over the last decade³⁴. This coincides with a decline in trust among Arab countries vis-à-vis degrees that are granted by others. However, this has not led to a clear agreement about an initial list of “degree mills,” even though references to these degrees and the institutions that grant them has become commonplace in other countries and other parts of the world.

Establishing an Arab space for higher education remains an advocacy; it has not become reality because we lack three conditions mentioned above: coordination between degrees and their recognition, quality assurance, and student and academic mobility. Meeting these conditions permitted the establishment of a European space for higher education, for example.

8. Conclusion

From what we have highlighted above, we can deduce that the challenges faced by higher education in the Arab world are many, and disparate in terms of their importance and depth.

We find the lowest level of challenges in the area of educational opportunities; the road is still a long one in a limited number of countries, while other countries have taken big strides forward. However, we should bear in mind that the problems of social inequality remain significant, with the exception of gender parity, and remember the importance of the private sector’s contribution to increasing educational opportunities remains limited.

The most difficult challenge lies in the area of quality; this includes several components of this quality, such as teaching methods, curricula, faculty and research, while this problem has accumulated in social sciences and the humanities. Perhaps this aspect explains the clear shortcoming in seeing higher education institutions shoulder their social responsibilities.

Challenges related to quality are linked to challenges related to management and finance. If the challenges of finance exhibit disparities among various countries, based on the disparity of their resources, management-related challenges are practically similar; they also inhibit opportunities for confronting quality-related challenges.

Finally, the challenge related to establishing an Arab space for higher education is of a different nature, since it requires joining forces in terms of efforts and intentions, at the Arab regional level as well as the sub-regional level (Maghreb, Mashreq, Gulf, etc.)

³⁴ The committee in charge of applying the agreement of degrees recognition in the Arab countries held two meetings, the first in Damascus (2003), where it agreed to update the Arab Agreement; the second in Beirut (2005), where the first draft of the project was discussed and representatives of some Arab countries submitted some written remarks on it. Al Awit, Henri, intervention made at ARCHE+10.