

**Understanding Private Higher Education in Saudi Arabia
- Emergence, Development and Perceptions**

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Abstract

This thesis looks into the factors underlying the emergence, development, and understandings of private higher education in Saudi Arabia from three perspectives. The first perspective is regional-historical, from which I examine the rise and growths of the private sector from a regional and historical point of view. The second perspective is institutional, from which I examine the perceptions of private higher education among different groups of stakeholders in comparison to its counterpart, the public sector, through three different phases of private higher education provision: 1) the entry point 2) the experience stage and 3) the exit to the job market. The third perspective can be perhaps understood as 'socio-political', from which I look at the relationship between the private sector and the wider political environment, and also the use of the English language in private higher education provision: how it presents itself as both a challenge and benefit for various stakeholders of it.

My analysis leads to a conclusion that the private sector is a necessary complement to a public one, which not only lacks the capacity but also is being challenged by many fronts. The public sector was found to fall short in meeting quantitative and qualitative demands for higher education. The sector of private higher education in Saudi Arabia is found to provide 'more' opportunities to higher education, to have 'different' characteristics from the public sector, leading it to be perceived as 'better' than the public sector.

Overall, this research is of a qualitative nature. For the regional-historical perspective, I use a wide range of literature and second-hand data. For the institutional perspective, I make use of empirical data collected from my fieldwork, which is also used for discussions in the third dimension along with government policy documents.

Based on the overall findings of this research, tentative recommendations are made for the future development of Saudi private higher education.

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Declaration and Word Length

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted either in the same or different form, to this or any other University for a degree. I also declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own. The word length of this thesis (inclusive of table and figures, and exclusive of bibliography and appendices) is: 81,971 Words.

PART I

Chapter 1

Introduction

In this opening chapter of my thesis, I shall begin with a brief historical review of the rise, the development and the growth of the private higher education sector. I shall then discuss the rise of private higher education in the Middle East, and in particular, Saudi Arabia, in order to familiarise my readers with the regional context of private higher education. Then I shall present my research questions in this regard and also the conceptual framework and the structure of this thesis. However, at this point, allow me to briefly elaborate on the immediate background of this research.

Research Background

Though private higher education has been common worldwide for many decades, it was only in 1998 that the first such institutions were permitted to open in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Also, there are few works on Saudi private higher education. Therefore, this thesis makes its unique contribution through an examination of the factors that have contributed to the emergence and the development of the private sector. In doing so, this study also investigates the extent to which this sector is distinct from its counterpart, the public sector.

The public sector was found to fall short in meeting quantitative and qualitative demands for higher education. The demand on higher education has been beyond the capacity of the public sector. Stakeholders perceive differences between public and private higher education. The private sector is seen to offer higher quality education in terms of teaching, learning, and extracurricular activities, etc. The private sector is also seen to improve graduates' employability because of the features above as well as its emphasis on practical class assignments and internships which link graduates more directly with the labour market. Although still only a small part of total enrolment, the private sector also provides access to some students who cannot gain admission to the public universities. The Government is found to have a major role on the emergence of the private sector - no private institution existed before its formal invitation to the

sector. The Government, however, has demonstrated an ambivalent attitude towards private higher education—in terms of planning, regulation, recognition and financial support.

For the purpose of this research, I adopted a qualitative research design for this exploratory study. The perceptions of a broad range of stakeholders--students, graduates, faculty and administrators, employers, government officials--were gathered through semi-structured interviews and thematically analysed. Secondary research sources included relevant literature on higher education and government policy documents.

Higher Education in the 20th Century

A wider research background for this research is the rise of private higher education in the global context. Over the past few decades, higher education throughout the world has undergone significant changes regarding its role and structure (Teichler, 1988, 2006). Until the early twentieth century, higher education was limited to a few universities outside Europe, North America, and the colonies of Great Britain (Rohstock, 2011). Higher education was considered a “public space[s] for free inquiry and the development of minds”, “an exemplary locus for deliberation, communication, interaction, and searching for truth or inter-subjective consensus” (Freid et al., 2007, p.594). While these remain important functions for higher education other economic and social demands became important focuses for it. Thus, higher education was no longer limited to the purpose of training for the elite.

The ‘massification’ of higher education systems started to take place in the 1930s in the USA, and shortly after the Second World War in the UK, the USSR, and other European countries. During this period, the economic and social roles of governments changed and as a result, higher education expansion was seen as a significant means to fulfil wider political, social, and economic objectives of modern governments (Robbins, 1963; Wittrock & Wagner, 1996). Policymakers were chiefly concerned with the human capital requirements in their planning for higher education. Modern neoclassic economists like Mincer (1993) and Becker(1964) argued that investment in human

capital through education and training would lead to economic prosperity for both individuals and businesses. It was argued that in order to increase the store of human capital within a nation, higher education should be available tuition free to all because their knowledge and skills would be of social benefit (Sadlak,2000). Similarly, governments of developed and developing countries towards the end of the twentieth century became more concerned about improving the store of human resources, especially with the advent of globalisation and the knowledge economy (Blondal et al., 2002). Individuals also became increasingly keen to pursue higher education for its observed positive impact on their employability, personal income, and social status (Mincer, 1993). Thus, higher education and governments have been facing significant financial and academic challenges because of this expansion of higher education (Teixeira, 2009). As the world globalises, economic competitiveness often depends on the extent to which a country can participate in the knowledge-based economy (Blondal et al., 2002).

The Growth of Private Higher Education Worldwide

While many governments in advanced economies were adopting a modern welfare state model in which equality and distribution of wealth was a key principle, funding the continuous expansion in higher education proved challenging (Barr, 2004). The increasing demand for higher education proved to be beyond the financial capacity of many governments, especially with the crisis of the welfare state from the 1980s onwards (Barr, 2004). Since then, there has been a need for greater efficiency in the allocation and distribution of public resources (Cave et al., 1990). Managerial values and conducts were promoted in public institutions, including higher education (Amaral et al., 2003). It was no longer feasible for governments to be fully responsible for the rising cost of higher education (Neave & Van Vught, 1994). This was in line with macro-level fiscal policies designed to restrain government expenditure and to increase private involvement in the provision of social services, a process of liberalisation (Middleton, 1996; Ball, 2007).

As governments began to reduce their direct control over higher education, the system became more diversified and public institutions were no longer the only form of higher education provided (Teichler, 2006). Privatisation was one policy introduced to reduce

dependence upon government funding. Recognising and accrediting privately managed higher education institutions has been an increasingly popular practice. One reason for this has been to enable such institutions to meet the increasing demand of higher education, which the public sector finds difficult to manage alone. Research by the Programme for Research on Private higher education (PROPHE) found that up to 31 % of the global share of higher education is now run privately (Levy, 2011), in the sense of its not being a state institution. However, ideas such as ‘private’ or ‘public’ are now rather complex, which will be discussed at length later in this thesis.

Unlike in Saudi Arabia, the private provision of higher education is not new around the world. In the USA, Latin America and Japan, it has existed for over a century. However, since the late 1980s private higher education has expanded and spread to most countries (Levy, 2010b). The rapid growth of private higher education has been particularly significant since the last decade of the twentieth century (Altbach, 2005,2009; Levy, 2002, 2005). In the early twenty-first century, there have been increases in the availability of private higher education in post-socialist Central and Eastern European countries (Altbach, 2005; Levy, 2007).

Historically, growth in this sector ranged from the old and traditional—aimed at the elite and religious groups—to educational institutions which had a wider appeal. According to the extant literature, there are very few countries which have a long history of private higher education. One notable exception is the USA, which depended on the private sector until the late nineteenth century (Chronister, 1980; Thelin, 2011). It is interesting to note that although the USA is considered to have the largest number of private higher education institutions, student enrolment in these institutions accounts for less than 20% of the total enrolment (Altbach, 1999, 2005). However, there is a notable increase in the emergence of private profit-making institutions such as Phoenix and Strayer in the USA in recent decades (Kinser & Levy, 2006). Similarly, a number of East Asian countries, including Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, and the Philippines, have long-established private higher education , with up to 80% of the students in these countries pursuing courses in them (Altbach, 1999).

There are some countries in which there is not a long-standing tradition of private higher education. Yet in these countries, when private education was firstly introduced, it was often considered to be “growing too fast” (Altbach, 1999, 2005; Levy, 1992, 2002, 2006b). For example, there are Asian countries such as China and Vietnam which do

not have an established tradition of private higher education institutions, but they are currently witnessing substantial growth in both the supply of and the demand for public higher education. China now has around 1,200 such institutions (Altbach et al.,2009; Gupta, 2008). In India, the sector is growing extremely rapidly, with one of the largest number of private higher education institutions in the world (Gupta, 2008; Levy, 2008).

Altbach et al. (2009) and Levy (2005,2007) explain that the private sector has been the fastest growing segment of higher education in many Central and Eastern European countries since the 1990s and the fall of Soviet Communism. But the percentage of enrolment in private higher education varies greatly between countries of the old Soviet bloc (Slantcheva & Levy, 2007). Levy indicates that this expansion has been unplanned and unregulated (Levy,2002). Interestingly, countries such as Poland have developed private higher education sectors which account for up to 30% of the entire higher education sector (Levy, 2003). In other countries, such as Russia and Bulgaria, the private sector accounts for roughly 10% of higher education, while in Albania and Croatia the private sector is extremely minimal (Levy, 2003). Although private higher education institutions are the fastest growing segment of higher education in Africa, the enrolment still accounts for a small share of the total enrolment (Varghese, 2004). South Africa is among the African countries in which the private sector is growing very rapidly and, interestingly, most of these are profit-making institutions (Mabizela, 2007; Kinser & Levy, 2006).

Latin America presents an interesting case. Although there is a long tradition of private higher education, at the same time the region is experiencing extremely fast rates of growth. Latin American countries have been experiencing a large growth in the private sector since the 1960s (Levy, 1986a), and in most of them the percentage of student enrolment in private institutions accounts for about a third of the total enrolment in higher education (Kinser et al., 2010). In places like Brazil and Chile, the private sector accounts for half the total enrolment (Altbach, 1999; Levy, 2005).

Research shows that in other parts of the world, growth in the private sector is slower. Western Europe remains cautious about the emergence of the private sector. There its contribution to higher education is limited and is the lowest for any region in the world. In this geographical area 90% of the enrolment is in the public sector (Altbach, 1999, 2005). The private sector is still small in major European countries like France, the UK, and Germany. Research also shows that there are countries such as Japan and Poland

which are experiencing a decline in private higher education growth (Levy, 2010a) due to demographic trends rather than anything directly related to the performance of universities. Levy explains that this is a result of social and political factors, such as declining population and further control from the government. Although Portugal was one of the first countries in Western Europe which allowed private higher education, there is now a decline in the number of students enrolled in those institutions (Amaral & Teixeira, 2000; Teixeira, 2006).

Exploring the growth of private higher education institutions in an international context allows for better understanding of differences in the development of the private sector throughout the world. The previously cited research makes clear that private higher education institutions have begun to step into the market of higher education in many parts of the world. Further, when we look at the growth we find that there is significant variation across countries, as some exhibit tremendous growth while other countries experience moderate or mild growth. We can see how developing countries are increasingly dependent upon private institutions, whereas the developed countries are still primarily dependent upon their strong public education sectors.

Coffman (2003) and Levy (2009) have traced the recent growth of private higher education institutions in the Gulf Cooperation Council States (GCC) of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman. In Saudi Arabia a second attempt has recently been made to establish a private higher education sector. The first attempt in 1967 failed to take root and involved just one institution, which was transformed into a publicly funded and governed university. The following section serves as a brief introduction to the development of private higher education in the Arab region.

Private Higher Education in the Arab World

Private universities in the Middle East were first established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The University of Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth, founded in 1875, was a French medical college located in Beirut and. The American University of Beirut was established in 1866 (Ghabra & Arnold, 2007;Herrera,2006). The American University in Cairo was founded in 1919 by American missionaries and was an English-language school. It was licensed in the State of New York with its Board of Trustees

and administrative offices in New York City (Ghabra & Arnold, 2007). These early institutions, with Western curricula, administration, and accreditation, served as models for the wider Arab world. Bertelsen (2009) observes that these institutions demonstrated:

Successful governance, quality assurance and funding can achieve academic success and recognition, as well as contributing significantly to human and other development in the host societies and the wider Middle East. (p. 2).

These institutions all eventually faced political pressures, backlash against the West, nationalist pride and resentment, threats of nationalisation, and in the case of Lebanon, violence. While struggling to maintain their autonomy, the two American universities were required to hire ever greater numbers of Egyptian and Lebanese faculty members.

The real beginnings of widespread private higher education in the Middle East dates from the 1980s. Private universities were founded in Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, and the UAE with varying degrees of quality, success, and educational approaches. By the early 1990s, in the Gulf States the pace rapidly accelerated. Willoughby (2008) accurately characterises this phenomenon as “an explosion of new higher education institutions in the small GCC countries” (p. 25). Between 1992 and 2007, 54 new private universities with Western (or Asian) affiliations were established in the Gulf countries. The totals for each country were: Bahrain—4; Kuwait—5; Oman—19; Qatar—4; the UAE—21 (Willoughby,2008). A complete list of these institutions is presented in Appendix 1. Noticeably, Saudi Arabia, the largest and wealthiest nation in the Gulf, had shown the least openness to this trend.

Origins of Saudi Private Higher Education

The first private university in Saudi was opened in 1967—King Abdul Aziz University (KAAU). It was located in the city of Jeddah, and functioned as a private higher education institution for four years before it became a public university. The KAAU originated from an idea in an article in Al-Madina Saudi newspapers in 1964 by its chief editor Mohamed Ali Hafiz (Batarfy,2005). Though not everyone welcomed the idea, it was supported by several businessmen. At that time, the country’s sole university was King Saud University in Riyadh, a public institution. Prominent citizens in the coastal

city of Jeddah argued that the country's only university was not accessible for people in other parts of the country. The Government, however, contested the establishment of a private university in Jeddah. A prominent businessman donated land and premises to be the campus of the new institution. The venture took off with the enthusiasm of its local supporters and the dedication of experts from Arab and Western countries (Batarfy,2005).

Eventually, success brought its own problems. Tuition was free, and income from donations and real-estate trusts were not sufficient to sustain the venture. The increasing demands in access to the newly born university led to serious financial difficulties. The university managed to gain minimum support from the Government, but the support was not sufficient to alleviate the problem. In 1971, the University Board asked the Government to take it over. The university thus became a public higher education institution under the same name—King Abdul Aziz University (Batarfy, 2005).

The failure of KAAU as a private university and its takeover by the Government was to have a long-lasting negative impact on the future development of private higher education in the Kingdom which was to persist for decades. The consequences of that failure will be further discussed in details in Chapter 10. After 1971, private higher education ceased to exist in the Kingdom and remained dormant. The idea was revived in the Government's Sixth Development Plan of 1995–2000. Studies were conducted, and the Council of Ministers approved the re-establishment of private higher education in 1998. This was only the second time the Government authorised the development of private higher education in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and it is thus considered a very new phenomenon. The first institutions opened as recently as 2000. While there are now 18 private colleges and 9 universities, this whole sector is still 'feeling its way'. For those Saudi educators involved in the field, private higher education remains very much an experiment.

Research Questions

In this thesis, I explore the reason behind the rise and development of private higher education in Saudi Arabia. Here are my main research questions:

- 1, What are the contributing factors behind the emergence and development of private higher education in the Saudi Arabia?
- 2, To what extent is the Saudi private higher education sector perceived to be distinct from the public sector?
- 3, What are the wider implications of private higher education for the higher education system and the country in general?

A qualitative research design was employed to address these research questions. Data are gathered from two major channels: first, interviews with over a hundred stakeholders, and second,—government policy documents and some other texts such as websites. I also analyse secondary literature to provide background and context for the research. These second-hand data are also used to complement and/or support the data from the interviews.

The function of private higher education in one country cannot be deduced from experiences in other national contexts. However, private higher education in one country may reflect global trends, while having some distinctive elements of its own. This study hopes to ascertain to what extent this is possible.

Personal Perspective

Apart from my academic studies for this PhD, this research is much inspired by my personal educational experience and also working experience in Saudi Arabia and beyond.

I received my B.A. degree in Business Administration at King Abdul-Aziz University (KAAU), a public university in Saudi Arabia but which, at one time, had been the first private university in Saudi Arabia. I then obtained an M.A. degree in Information Management at Marymount, a private college in Washington D.C. Subsequently, I completed an M.A. degree in Assistive Technology (technology for the disabled) at George Mason, a public university in Virginia. Thus, in my own academic path I have experienced both public and private higher education institutions in two very different countries. These experiences heightened my awareness of differences between public and private higher education.

In addition, private education has also been part of my family history. My family have been educational pioneers in Saudi Arabia with my grandfather, Abdul-Raouf Jamjoom establishing with colleagues, Al-Falah school, the first private school for boys in Jeddah 1905. In the 1960s, an uncle of mine was a co-founder of the country's first private university. When I returned from the US to Saudi Arabia at the end of 2006, I began working at a private college in Jeddah which opened in 2000 marking the new beginning of private higher education in Saudi Arabia. Initially, I helped instructors to develop practical elements in their courses linked to specific market needs. For example, I tried to link up Information Technology course materials to the banking sector based on discussions with bank officials. My work was made possible because the college was a new institution in a new field of education, one which was especially focused on linking theory to practical class assignments related to the labour market. This was vitally important as the public universities had not managed to provide employers with sufficient numbers of adequately trained graduates.

My personal working experience added some new perspectives to my understanding of the private sector in Saudi Arabia. In 2007, I became Vice Dean of Student Affairs at this private college. By that time, it had 400 female students and 700-800 male students attending on two separate campuses. My position included overseeing enrolments and registration; extracurricular activities; the student union as well as the career and counselling centres. These various areas of college operations and my daily contact with students gave me new insight into the special qualities (and problems) of private higher education and its contrast with the public sector. For example, I initially did not consider extracurricular activities to be of particular significance compared to academic courses but I came to see the importance these had for students, especially in a closed, restrictive society like Saudi Arabia. Similarly, the importance of internships, student union activities and the career centre were also a revelation to me. The impact of these aspects of college life is vividly expressed by the student stakeholders themselves in Chapter 7 of this study.

When I left for the US for my graduate work, private higher education was just beginning in the Saudi Arabia. When I returned and took the position of Vice Dean at a private college, I became keenly aware of the difficult transitional state of a new institution offering a new kind of education. Many people, particularly the parents of prospective or newly enrolling students, were doubtful and hesitant about this new college. Did the government really recognize it? Did it have the proper licenses? Was it accredited? Would it last? What would sustain it? Was it really better than public higher education which in Saudi Arabia is tuition-free and comes with a paid stipend? These were questions I had to answer on a daily basis and with serious questioning on my own part. It was these kinds of questions that led me to the research questions of the present study. By exploring explore stakeholders' perceptions of Saudi private higher education it has been possible to provide answers to a number of questions.

Conceptual Framework

For the purpose of this research, there is perhaps no single theory which can fit perfectly as a research framework. Therefore, I develop my own conceptual framework to conduct this proposed multi-faceted analysis of private higher education in Saudi

Arabia. I intend to explore the rise, development, and perceptions of private higher education from three perspectives: regional-historical, institutional, and socio-political.

Allow me to elaborate a little more on these three perspectives. For the first perspective, I place a discussion of the rise and development of private higher education in a regional context, and look for relevant information in history which will shed some light on the birth and growth of the private sector. This is perhaps among the most commonly used approaches. However, I do not intend to investigate certain understudied historical events or to clarify some misunderstandings about the local educational history. Instead, I intend only to conduct a regional-historical review which would provide enough background information for my examinations in another two analyses: Parts III and IV of this thesis.

With regard to the second perspective, institutional, I do not plan to investigate the governance or daily management practices of private institutions. Rather, I only wish to place my discussions and analysis in an institutional setting. For this part, I look into, in particular, the perceptions of the private sector among different stakeholders of higher education—students, faculty members, administrators, regulators, and employers, in terms of the three phases of higher education: Entry to the system, Experience within the system, and exit to a job market. This, I believe, is a rather straightforward way to organise the themes and topics which emerged from my field.

For the third perspective, I must be cautious in pointing out that my analysis bears a very small ambition. I do not propose to investigate local politics, international relationship, or social changes in the Middle East, as one might read in a conventional political or social study. Rather, my scope of analysis is much narrower than the conventional Middle East studies. I choose two issues which I find most relevant to the inquiry of this thesis: the use of the English language in the private sector, and also the changing relationship between the private sector and the Saudi Government. These two issues, I believe, can shed some interesting light on the past growth and also the future development of private higher education in a Middle East country such as Saudi Arabia. The use of the English language, for instance, brings both benefits and challenges to the participants of higher education and also others who view this issue from a non-educational angle. The changing relationship between the private sector and the Central Government serves to remind us that there is no single universal way to understand

private higher education; every country has its particular socio-political context, without which one cannot possibly understand what really happened, and why things happened in the ways they did.

In the light of this conceptual framework, I now move on to present the structure of this thesis.

Contribution to Knowledge

This research contributes to two study areas: first, to higher education studies, in particular studies of the private sector; second, to regional studies of the Middle East and, in particular, Saudi Arabia.

For the former, studies of the private sector only began to attract wider attentions in the 1990s, and in general, literature on private higher education is still very limited. It is more so, on the regional level of the Middle East. A reason for this scarcity is that the system is relatively new to the region compared to other parts of the world. Also, the research area is less active in this region. Exploring the situation of private higher education in the KSA will add a field to the global landscape, providing comparisons and contrast with the situation in other countries.

For the latter, the Middle East, although not a new topic, has been intensively studied from social, cultural, and political perspectives. With regard to the case of Saudi Arabia, most of the international publications are around its modern history, political economy, foreign policy, and cultural identities. Few, if any, study the country from the perspective of higher education. Therefore, this research brings in a new angle to studies of the region. By looking into the role of private higher education, one can better understand how a modern Middle East country such as Saudi Arabia is coping with the changes and challenges which come with the global economy.

The present study is stimulated by the work of Daniel Levy of Yale University. Levy has been a prominent in arguing that the private Higher Education system has not been a static entity but instead has changed and evolved over many years in response to social, economic and political change (1986a, 2006a, 2007). Levy's work, amongst others, has asserted that with recent expansion of the private sector, it has now become a major presence within Higher Education generally and therefore it deserves sustained critical

investigation. The present study is a contribution towards this aim that Levy advocates, focussing upon developments within the Saudi Arabian H.E. Sector which up to now has not been studied in much detail. The intention of the present study is to make a contribution to the international understanding of the growth and character of private H.E. Roger Geiger of Pennsylvania state University has been another key influence for the present study through his work on typologies of the purpose of the private higher education system. His work has drawn attention to the inherent diversity that exists within this sector, something that is traced in some detail through this study in relation to Saudi Arabia

Limitations

One of the major limitations of this study is related to its data sample. I managed to collect data for my empirical work from one city only, where higher education institutions are most concentrated. This will inevitably raise the issue of the generalisability of my findings. This also applies to the fact that all student interviewees at the higher education institutions involved in this study specialise in business-related subjects. Another limitation is related to the access to government personnel and policy documents; I managed to interview only a relatively small number of government officials and gain access to a number of government documents on private higher education. This limits the scope of my research in particular from the socio-political perspective.

Structure of the thesis

This study is organised into four parts. Part I, including this chapter, serves as a background discussion for later sections. Part II, including Chapters 2 and 3, looks into the rise and development of private higher education in Saudi Arabia from a regional-historical perspective. Part III, including Chapters 6, 7, and 8, adopts an institutional perspective, looking into the three phases of higher education: Entry, Experience, and Exit. Part IV, including Chapters 9 and 10, takes up a socio-political perspective, by looking at the use of the English language in the private sector, and also the changing relationship between the private sector and the Saudi Government.

For the plan with each individual chapter, Chapter 2 discusses the complexity involved in defining private higher education. It presents concepts used in the literature for analysing private higher education.

Chapter 3 provides a brief history of the country, its governance, and its demographics. The Saudi economy is analysed with regard to national development plans, the labour market, unemployment among Saudi Arabian nationals, and the participation of women in the workforce.

Chapter 4 surveys the development of the Saudi Arabian education system, particularly public higher education. Chapter 4 analyses the newly emerging private higher education sector. This is seen in the regional context of the Gulf States. Enrolment trends and supply/demand challenges are examined.

Following these background chapters, Chapter 5 outlines the methodology of the study, discussing in detail the qualitative interpretive research approach selected. Methods used to gather and analyse the data derived from stakeholders' perceptions of Saudi private higher education are described.

Chapters 6 and 7 present an in-depth look at a wide variety of stakeholders' perceptions of that sector in relation to admission requirements, subjects' choices, teaching, learning and extracurricular activities. Chapter 8 explores the relationship between private higher education and the Saudi labour market. Literature on graduates' employability and the labour market is reviewed. The skill levels of graduates are considered and the value of practical class assignments and internships as links to the labour market are presented through the perceptions of stakeholders.

Chapter 9 covers stakeholders' perceptions on the use of the English language as a medium of instruction in private higher education institutions, and the implication it has for students' choice of institutions (public or private), teaching, learning, and graduates' employability.

Chapter 10 examines the relationship between Saudi private higher education and the Government. Government policies, regulations, and financial support, as well as quality assurance mechanisms, are analysed as a complement to stakeholders' perceptions.

The Conclusion will address the overall findings of the research, and explore some bigger issues that emerge from my discussion in this thesis. The thesis will end with some recommendations for the future development of Saudi private higher education.

Chapter 2

Understanding Private Higher Education

Introduction

This chapter attempts to discuss private higher education in Saudi Arabia with reference to some concepts and typologies used in private higher education studies. I first look into the difficulty of identifying private higher education. This chapter presents some conceptual tools used to analyse private higher education in developing countries, which is also applied to the case of Saudi Arabia. The types and functions of private higher education institutions are surveyed, and key categories for defining and understanding private institutions are presented. Finally, I make use of the typologies produced by Levy (1986a) and Geiger(1986) in identifying key functions of private higher education.

Defining Private Higher Education

Scholars such as Altbach (1999), Geiger (1986), and Levy, (1986b, 1999, 2002) acknowledge the complexity of defining private higher education and agree that there is no universal definition applicable to institutions in different countries and regions. The sector emerged diversely in different countries with different histories and contexts (Altbach, 1999). Every nation, to some extent, has its own criteria which differentiate its public and private higher education institutions. These criteria are different from those in other national contexts. Boundaries between the two sectors in various regional and national contexts are becoming increasingly blurred, with privatisation taking place within the public sector and with various degrees of state control and supervision over the private sector (Altbach 1999; Levy, 1986b, 2002, 2003).

Therefore, there is a need to understand how private higher education is related to the concept of 'privatisation'. Butler (1991, p. 17), defines privatisation as "a shifting of a function, either in whole or in part from the public sector to the private sector". According to Maldonado et al. (2004), privatisation in higher education covers a spectrum of organisational forms. At one end is the public higher education institution 'privatising' aspects of its operation, while at the other end is the private sector,

establishing institutions designed to be seen as separate from those which fall within the public sector. The latter type will be considered here, and will form the main focus of this study—private higher education in Saudi Arabia.

To exemplify this critical approach of ‘function shifting’, one must first identify ‘hybrid’ forms which blur the boundaries between public and private sectors. This would include those established by public universities. Murphy (1996) describes a range of forms of organisation, including privatisation of services by contracting them to the private sector: an example of this is the leasing of internal printing and reprographic services to a private contractor to operate exclusively within a university; another example is a sub-contractual arrangement with a catering company to provide a full range of services throughout the institution.

Another form of privatisation may be identified as ‘cost-shifting’. An example of this is when public higher education institutions begin to charge tuition fees to students to cover some of their costs. In effect, this means charging for public services which were previously paid by the public purse. A further example of a form of privatisation is the establishment by a public higher education institution of an independent company, or a cost unit, or a corporation with operational autonomy as a way of generating extra revenue. Varghese (2004) called this type of privatisation the “Corporatisation of Universities”.

These cases of ‘privatising’ public higher education reveal the blurring boundaries between the public and private sectors. This distinction is also blurred by the tendency for private institutions to operate like public bodies. Levy refers to this as “isomorphism” (Levy, 1999). In some cases, institutions are coerced to assume certain organisational forms, while for others certain forms are adopted for purely commercial reasons, a sort of copying or mimicry (*mimesis*). One therefore often sees tactics used to disguise certain aspects of a private higher education organisation, for instance the adoption of the curricular outline of an accredited public counterpart by a private institution to ensure its own accreditation.

Levy suggests that this blurring between public and private is increasing and that almost the only way to differentiate between the two sectors is through identifying their legal status (Levy, 198b). According to Levy (1986b) “...no behavioural criterion or set of criteria distinguishes institutions legally designated private from institutions legally designated public.” (p. 170). This view will be examined in relation to Saudi Arabia.

Based on my readings of the scholarship on private higher education (Altbach, 1999), Geiger (1986), and Levy (1986a, 1986b, 1999, 2003), the key categories used in analysing the private sector are presented in the table below:

Table 1: Perspectives for understanding private Higher Education

Perspectives in understanding private Higher Education	Funding	Different types of financial resources it relies on
	Ownership	The extent to which it is owned by private investors/bodies
	Orientation	The extent to which it is about: 1, Teaching, 2, Research, 3, Religion or 4, Market oriented
	Functions and Roles	The extent to which it aims to provide 1, Wider access to higher education, 2, Different forms of higher education, or 3, Higher quality education
	Governance	The extent to which it is subject to direct government supervision

*Based on the work of Altbach(1999), Geiger (1986), and Levy (1986a, 1986b, 1999, 2003)

The following sections investigate these dimensions and will present the complexity of defining private higher education using any of these criteria alone (Levy, 1986b). I shall examine how these perspectives are explored in studies of private higher education, and to what extent they can be applied to the Saudi context.

Funding

Funding used to be the most clear-cut distinction between public and private higher institutions. However, many governments since the 1980s have endorsed policies which support the cost-sharing of higher education. The introduction of such policies around the world represented a shift in ideology from perceiving higher education as a “public good” to seeing it as a “private good” (Johnes, 2004). Although sources of financing vary among private higher education institutions, Altbach (1999) and Levy (1992, 2003) have shown how the majority of private ones rely upon tuition fees as their main source of funding. In the USA, for example, reliance on tuition fees has a long history. A small number of private institutions also have external sources of funding, such as sponsoring by religious organisations. Resources may also take various forms such as endowments, student grants, loans, research grants, or alumni contributions (Altbach, 1999). Indirect supports from governments towards private institutions can also take the form of research contracts. This is the case with most elite private institutions in the USA, where government-sponsored research is undertaken (Altbach, 1999). Using the source of funding to identify private higher education institutions thus can be confusing. Many public higher education institutions now charge their students and some private institutions receive funds from governments (Levy, 1986a). Altbach (1999) suggests that the only difference which can be found in this regard is that tuition fees in public higher education institutions are not the main source of funding; rather, each public institution has its budget allocation within the total government budget. In addition, there are private higher education institutions, such as some in Holland and Belgium, which receive funds from their governments, much equal to the public counterparts (Geiger, 1986). Therefore using funding as a criterion is not sufficient in examining the nature of higher education institution.

Sources of funding, however, can still be a reliable differentiating factor between public and private higher education institutions when the public sector does not charge students any fees. In Saudi Arabia for example, public sector education is still tuition-free, the exception being a small number of programmes which have been recently introduced to the sector. Students in the public sector are also provided with a monthly stipend. The Government has only recently begun offering financial support towards private higher education institutions, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 10. Since 2010, government scholarships have been available to fund up to 50 % of those enrolled in private institutions, based on their individual merits. No stipends are paid.

As will be seen, there is no culture of government support towards private higher education in Saudi Arabia.

Ownership and Governance

The legal ownership of higher education institutions is found to be less ambiguous than other criteria to classify institutions as public or private (Levy, 1986b). Altbach (1999), however, points out the significant variations of ownership within and between countries. Private institutions could be owned by either non-profit or profit-making agencies, or both. Individuals or companies might also own private higher education institutions, as in the case of the University of Phoenix, which is owned by the Apollo Group (Kinser & Levy, 2006). According to Altbach(1999), in most parts of the world private colleges and universities began as non-profit institutions and were legally established by religious organisations. However, profit-making higher education institutions have recently emerged and been expanding at a rapid rate (Kinser & Levy, 2006).

Varghese (2004) adds to Altbach's (1999) observation by discussing another form of ownership in which private institutions work with foreign collaborators. He explains how an institution might be set up in one country but owned by individuals in another, a form of transnational ownership. The term 'transnational' here is used in the sense employed by McBurnie and co-authors (2001), in which learners are located in a different country from where the awarding institution is situated. According to Altbach (1999) transnational private providers are usually based in developed countries, e.g. the UK and Australia, and receivers are in developing countries. This type of provision has several advantages for the receiver country, such as absorbing the excess demand for higher education, decreasing the 'brain-drain' phenomenon occurring mostly in developing countries, helping students to be with their families, and most importantly, saving the expenses of earning a degree abroad (Altbach, 2005). For example, the University of Nottingham has established campuses in Malaysia and China, and Cornell University in Qatar.

Australia and the UK present an interesting case, in which public universities have established 'transnational' private arms, through setting up foreign campuses and providing distance education services to students in other countries, mostly in South Africa, Asian countries, and in the Pacific regions. That means that these higher

education institutions are public in the home country whereas private in their host country. Public higher education institutions from developed countries are establishing sub-branches in other developing or transition countries (Varghese, 2004) imitating the franchise model of the commercial world.

In the Gulf nations, for example, The higher education boom of the 1990s was marked by a reaching out to Western higher education institutions and, to a lesser degree, Asian, for collaboration in the development, administration, curricula, faculty recruitment and training, and quality standards of these new national institutions. Coffman notes the “unquestioned dominance of the American university model in the Gulf” (2003, p. 1). Characterising these many new collaborations is not easy. Several terms are used such as ‘affiliations’, ‘loose affiliations’, ‘partnerships’, ‘alliances’, ‘branches’, or ‘satellite campuses’ of Western or Asian institutions. But these terms can be easily confusing and their meanings overlapping.

Willoughby constructs what I believe is the most useful typology for these various new affiliations. He points out five existing models: 1) symbolic association 2) formal supervision 3) formal endorsement 4) subcontracting, and 5) branch campus (Willoughby, 2008, pp. 14–15). Among them, ‘symbolic association’ denotes a Gulf institution collaborating with an external partner in developing its academic programme which is “modelled on those of its partner” (Willoughby, 2008). ‘Formal supervision’ occurs when the external partner develops and monitors parts (or all) of the academic programme. ‘Formal endorsement’, which may overlap with formal supervision, describes a Gulf institution obtaining the endorsement of its programme (or institution) by an external partner who “normally provides credentialing services to higher education institutions in the West” (Willoughby, 2008, p. 14). In effect, such an endorsement means the Gulf institution is comparable to the Western institution.

Willoughby’s fourth model—‘subcontracting’—designates a Gulf institution which obtains its initial academic and administrative staff to develop the new institution through the external partner. The Gulf institution may then hire its own staff but “asks its Western partner to oversee either all or part of its academic and administrative development”. This oversight will then in turn “create a more credible academic institution” (Willoughby, 2008, p. 15). The fifth model—‘branch campus’—is a variant of subcontracting. The prospective Gulf entity does not seek Western help in setting up its institution. Instead, the Western institution “is invited to create a branch campus ...

with the power to grant a degree in the name of that (Western) university” (Willoughby, 2008). In essence, the Western institution exercises control over all major elements of the school.

Willoughby’s models provide a spectrum of choices reflecting greater or lesser amounts of control by the external Western partner. The choice faced by the Gulf institution—its founders—is: How much do they want to exercise control, versus how much credibility do they wish the institution to have from a particular association with a Western university?

In Appendix 2, Willoughby’s five models are applied to all of the 54 new Gulf institutions with Western (and Asian) affiliations which have opened between 1992 and 2007. The large number and variety of models clearly indicate that the Gulf is a centre for educational innovation. Willoughby links this phenomenon to the oil wealth of the region, the extreme dependence on foreign skilled workers, the previous weakness and a lack of development of the education sector. A further significant factor is the high population growth rate of the region as a whole. 60 % of the Gulf population is under 16 (Coffman, 2003). So the demand factor in the education sector is immense. In the Gulf, private higher education is seen as “a means of ensuring quality of instruction and the relevance to market needs that have been missing from the public universities” (Coffman., p. 3). As we shall see, this is very much the case in Saudi Arabia.

These new Gulf affiliations (see Appendix 1) with the West (and Asia) include institutions of a remarkable diversity. Oman has affiliations with universities in England (Bedfordshire, Leeds, and Coventry), Scotland (Glasgow Caledonian University), the USA (Carnegie Mellon, University of Missouri-St. Louis), Leipzig University, and universities in India and Australia. Kuwait has partnerships with multiple Indian universities, an Australian university, and Dartmouth College. Qatar has affiliations with American universities (Cornell, Georgetown, Virginia Commonwealth, Texas A&M) as well as CHN University of Higher Professional Education in The Netherlands. Bahrain has relationships with the Universities of London, Leicester, and The Royal College of Surgeons (Ireland) as well as The University of Newfoundland (Canada). The UAE presents a “dizzying array of private institutions that are quickly eclipsing the government universities” (Coffman, 2003, p. 2). These include partnerships with universities in India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Belgium, Australia, Wales, Scotland, USA, and

in England. Although these many new joint ventures in the Gulf are still new, their impact are likely to be socially and economically significant:

The fact that so many universities and colleges have come into existence suggest that there are strong social and political dynamics within the region supporting the deeper economic integration of Gulf societies with global and regional economic life. (Willoughby, 2008, p. 29).

In Saudi Arabia, no transnational institutions exist yet, as no foreign ownership is allowed - unlike in many countries where ownership by foreign individuals is permitted, Saudi Arabian law requires that there be at least five partners acting jointly as owners. A company may also be an owner. Non-profit status and profit-making status are both permitted for private institutions. The majority of private institutions, however, are operating on a profit-making basis. This complexity in forms of ownership and in legal status highlights the difficulties of defining the 'private', as any form of ownership in Saudi Arabia is heavily conditioned by regulation and control. The extent of control which Saudi government has on the sector is discussed throughout the following chapters. As Levy has written (1986a), the status of legal ownership does not reveal how the institution actually functions. He has shown that in many cases private higher education institutions are found to be less autonomous than their public counterparts, which are completely funded by the government. Pachuashvili (2011) also explains how in a post-communist setting, legally defined non-profit and profit-making private institutions can hardly be differentiated as both of them rely mainly on tuition fees, and have a market orientation.

Orientation

Private higher education institutions vary in their orientation: some are research-oriented, others are religiously affiliated, while others are specialised institutions (Altbach, 1999; Geiger, 1986; Levy, 1986a, 1986b, 2003). Most prestigious private universities have a research focus (Altbach, 1999). According to Levy (1992, 2003) and Altbach (2005), the religiously affiliated institutions used to constitute the majority of private institutions world-wide. However, their dominant position is diminishing as specialised institutions are coming to lead the market, such as colleges focusing upon business and finance, legal, or medical studies, rather than offering a full range of academic subjects (Altbach, 1999). Levy (1999, 2003, 2006a, 2006b) asserts that recently

developed private higher education institutions possess a unique potential, which allows them to fill certain special niches in preparing graduates for future employment.

One piece of evidence which Levy (1986a) uses to highlight the distinctiveness of private institutions is their mission statement. Levy argues that the mission of private higher education institutions is less inclusive and broad, focusing rather on specific target markets. The students they seek to attract tend to be narrowly focused, selective, and specialised themselves. He further (1986a, 2002, 2006a) observes that private institutions concentrate on fields which are related to 'future' jobs. Notwithstanding the above, some studies criticise programmes offered by private institutions for giving priority to private benefits over social ones. For instance James (1991a, p.193–194) argues that research and broad educational needs are less important to the private sector.

Some studies point out that private institutions concentrate on fields that are less expensive to teach and maintain. Comparative study by Teixeira and Amaral (2007) similarly find private higher education institutions to have a "low-risk" strategy and concentration on low-cost and /safe initiatives. However, there are exceptions, such as private higher education institutions offering very expensive courses of study, such as medicine, as is the case in the KSA. This will be examined more fully in later chapters.

In terms of orientation, Saudi private higher education is not characterised by a variety of religious affiliations, unlike in other nations where Islam or Christianity is the dominant and/or institutional religion. A particular school of Islam is favoured and imposed throughout the country's institutions. But it must be stated that unlike a country such as the USA, no private higher education institution in the KSA focuses on religious (Islamic) studies also in contrast to some of their counterparts in the public sector. Also, most of the Saudi Arabian private institutions are focused on teaching rather than research, with only one exception - the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), a new research university.

Before I end my discussion in this section, I also want to discuss briefly a special higher education institution, as it may shed some interesting lights on the future development of higher education in the KSA. In September of 2009 King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), a graduate-level research university was opened for admission. Located by the Red Sea about 50 miles from Jeddah, KAUST has a vast campus--36 sq. kilometres--which includes a marine sanctuary and research facility--and

a small city contained within its borders. The cost of the project--\$12.5 billion--comes with the financial support from King Abdullah and the royal family. A \$10 billion endowment fund is also being created for the University (Cambanis, 2007). For students who are admitted, tuition is free with additional stipends. Graduate students may receive stipends of up to \$20,000 per year. KAUST offers both M.Sc. and Ph.D. degrees.

The King bypassed the MOHE by selecting ARAMCO (the country's state oil company) to develop the initial plan, build the campus and assist in curriculum. The University of Texas (Austin), the University of California (Berkeley) and Stanford University have partnered with KAUST to develop specific curricula and assist with selecting faculty (KAUST, 2012). These are among the first such Western affiliations in Saudi Arabia. KAUST is focused on applied research and has established multi-disciplinary research centres. These centres will pursue research in areas such as clean combustion, solar and alternative energy science, water desalination and computational bioscience. KAUST may serve another function vital to the Kingdom's future--the training of the next generation of university professors. Dr. Mohammed Kuchai, a microbiologist at KAAU, remarked: "Saudi Arabia is projected to need 100,000 university staff by 2030 but only has 40,000 today so training future staff is a priority" (Sawahel, 2006).

KAUST also represents a very significant departure from traditional Saudi social norms. Men and women are on the same campus and attend the same classes. This is the first time this has been allowed in the Kingdom. Women are not required to have their heads covered in class and may drive on campus. In addition, non-Saudi students may also enrol. The entire Kingdom will be closely watching the results of this educational and social "experiment."

In general comparison, Saudi Arabia's private institutions are more market-oriented in their degree programmes and course works. This will be further explored in Chapter 6

Functions and Roles: 'Different', 'Better', and 'More'

In this section I shall explore the functions and roles of private higher education in the light of what I call 'three assumptions'. These three assumptions revolved around the emergence and development of the private sector in higher education world-wide. To one extent, the private sector is set to provide more educational opportunities or to offer different forms of education than is provided by the existing public sector, or to introduce educational provision of higher quality as a response to a public sector which fails the expectations of its stakeholders.

Geiger (1986) and Levy (1986a) have observed that private higher education institutions around the world also vary in their missions. They both discuss 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' roles for private higher education in each country, which emerged to fulfil a specific role or function (Levy, 1986a, 1999, 2003; Geiger, 1986). Levy (1986b; 2010b) identifies three 'waves' which appeared in sequence. The **first** wave represents the establishment of private higher education to accommodate the needs of certain religious or ethnic/identity groups. The **second** wave is marked by the establishment of elite private institutions as a reaction to the mass orientation of public higher education institutions, when students are looking for prestigious forms of education. In Latin America, for example, public higher education growth came first as a religious response to public sector secularisation, and then as an elite response to a massifying and socio-economically more open public sector open (Levy, 1986a). The **third** wave witnesses the establishment of private institutions to absorb the excess demand on higher education which the state public sector can no longer fulfil. He adds, however, that demand-absorbing institutions may cross these category boundaries and also have a religious orientation and/or be prestigious.

Geiger (1986), working at the same time as Levy, develops his ideas along similar lines. He describes three main functions for private higher education institutions. They are to provide 'more', 'better', and 'different' education. The 'more' function occurs when private higher education institutions exist to absorb an immense demand which public institutions cannot meet. The private sector in this case becomes a 'mass' sector, and thus becomes the major provider of higher education. The reason behind the public sector's inability to meet the demand for higher education is usually because those public institutions are small in size and have restrictive admission policies. However, the quality of private higher education institutions which fulfil this 'more' function is

questioned. These are the institutions which Levy (1986b) describes as “demand-absorbing”. In developing countries, most private higher education is believed to fall within this category (Levy, 2003, 2006b). In countries where public-sector education is limited and deficient, a large non-selective private sector is often developed to provide for the large group which is expelled from the public sector, such as happened in the Philippines (James,1991a).

The second function, outlined by Geiger, is to provide ‘different’ education. Private higher education institutions are found to exist even when the public sector has the capacity to absorb the demand for places in higher education. This role is played when the state allows private provision to respond to certain needs which are not met by the public sector institutions. An example of this is the necessity of public sector colleges to be available for all; therefore they cannot discriminate in favour of minority groups. Levy (2011) has further categorised this type of institution under the ‘identity’ type. An example of an identity institution is the Catholic University of Korea, a private institution with a history 150 years. It serves a distinct minority group within the country of specific cultural and religious orientations. Thus, the public sector in this case is not faced with a capacity issue, but rather an issue of a demand from specific cultural groups to have access to a distinctive form of higher education, which is obviously outside their norms of higher education provision. Where cultural, social, and economic diversity is alongside a strong and relatively uniform public sector, the private sector can exploit the demand for distinctive forms of provision. Supposedly, the issue of quality (real or perceived) may also encourage the growth of a high-quality private sector.

In Geiger’s analysis of the different roles of private higher education institutions, the third function is to compensate for the low quality found in the public sector by providing ‘better’ education. In this scenario the private sector is of a higher quality and is perceived by students and their parents as offering a better alternative to a failing public sector. Private institutions may also offer courses of a quality matching what is offered by the public sector, thus enhancing competition within the higher education system.

Levy (2011) provides a similar typology on private institutions according to their criteria for access and the clientele they serve. In addition to the ‘identity’ type, mentioned above, his typology includes ‘elite’, ‘semi-elite’, ‘serious demand-absorbing’ and ‘demand-absorbing’ private institutions. Private institutions become ‘elite’, not for

serving “privileged clientele but for their academic and intellectual leadership” (Levy, 2009, p. 15). Levy (2010b, 2011) highlights the fact that the USA is an exception to having private ‘elite’ institutions, as this type mostly exists in the public sector (Levy, 2009). Elite private institutions are distinct for their high selectivity and for their focus on research. Levy (2009) observes that research is rarely a concern for new private institutions. Therefore, he categorises them as ‘semi-elite’ and found their focus to be more upon practical learning and training. Levy (2009,2010b, 2011) observes that ‘semi-elite’ private institutions have average levels of selectivity in recruiting students and faculty, less than those of ‘elite institutions’ but more than those in the ‘serious demand-absorbing’ category. The average selectivity and the high tuition fees of semi-elite institutions imply that their clientele is formed of those from wealthier socio-economic groups and with good academic standards. Like elite private institutions, semi-elite ones are thus less likely to be primarily addressing “access” issues (Levy, 2008, 2009). Levy, however, suggests that semi-elite institutions indirectly contribute to increasing access to higher education, as they:

- (a) bring more finance to higher education;
- (b) open public slots for others by attracting some students away from those slots;
- (c) diminish the flow of domestic students going abroad. (Levy, 2009, p. 16).

His point is that when examining the place of such institutions within the wider higher education system, one needs to look at the indirect impacts they exert. In addition, serious demand-absorbing and demand-absorbing institutions are also sometimes described as ‘garage’ institutions or ‘diploma mills’, and are less selective in recruiting students and staff.

Demand-absorbing and serious demand-absorbing institutions are less selective with regard to student access. However, serious demand-absorbing institutions tend to have a clearer focus upon their graduates’ future employability. They therefore orient themselves to the labour market through different activities (Levy, 2008). Serious demand institutions are found to be more innovative and entrepreneurial in their linkage with the labour market. In contrast, demand-absorption institutions lack academic quality and infrastructure development, partly because financial resources are taken out of the system as profit.

Along with the World Bank (1994), advocates of private sector provision within higher education argue that such expansion frees places within the public system. They also

point out that it reduces state spending commitments and increases diversity and choice. Using a shareholder model from businesses, private institutions are arguably more accountable. Possibly the strongest argument is that this brings additional financial resources into the system. Private provision may be an ideal complement where public institutions are perceived to be weak.

However, recent studies suggest that quality issues in private education remain, one being academic staff - private colleges are likely to employ academic staff on a part-time basis, who also work full-time in the public sector (for instance, Fried et al., 2007, pp. 619–634). Evidence from a survey of many European countries (Fried et al., 2007) shows that the quality of education offered by the private sector is likely to be inferior to that of the public sector. However, in their conclusion the authors suggest that negative findings may partly be the result of using criteria for assessment which were designed for public-sector higher education institutions and therefore discriminate against private sector institutions.

Another key dimension in examining characteristics of private sector higher education is its relation to the state. It is to this that we turn in the following section.

Governance: Private Higher Education and the State

Altbach (1999), Altbach et al. (1999), Geiger (1986), and Levy (1986a, 1986b) have outlined the diversity in private higher education within and among nations. Although it is now widespread, governments around the globe do not equally recognise this sector (Kinser et al., 2010). In some countries, for example, private higher education, although long-standing, remains marginalised by governments. This is one of the key findings of the Europe-wide study undertaken by UNESCO (Fried et al., 2007). It was also found that policies in a particular country affect the emergence, growth, and nature of this sector (Levy & Zumeta, 2011; Slantcheva, 2007). According to Levy (2008, p. 9),

“Much of private higher education growth and ultimately size and shape is a function of government policy, the government policy on private higher education strongly condition private higher education growth, whether intentionally or not.” Therefore, government involvement in the private sector is an important dimension not to be missed while understanding private higher education in the KSA, and I will explore this dimension more thoroughly in Chapter 10.

Levy (2011, p.383) also explains, “Governments and government policies have not usually been the central driving for the sector’s appearance.” Levy (2003, 2006a) also observes that the development of private higher education seems to take governments by surprise, especially in developing or transitional countries. However, he suggests that government supervision is growing commonly through delayed regulations (Levy, 2011). Nevertheless, private higher education in the Arabian Gulf countries differ from Levy’s observation as its early emergence is due to the initiative of the individual governments, rather than the efforts of the private sector itself (Levy, 2006). Varghese (2004) argues that internal and external policies can encourage the presence of private higher education institutions. In Central and Eastern Europe, with the fall of communist party state, the private sector was encouraged to enter the educational arena (Altbach, 2005; Varghese, 2004). In most developing countries it was an external policy which drove the expansion of the private education sector, such as that of the World Bank’s Structural Adjustment Programme of the 1980s (World Bank, 1994). Through these policies, the World Bank encouraged developing countries to reduce their investment in higher education, and to open the door for private investment.

In his 1996 empirical study, Zumeta analyses state policies affecting private non-profit higher education in the USA. He finds that state policy usually tends toward one of

three modes: 'laissez-faire', 'central planning', and 'market competitive'. In the 'laissez-faire' mode, private higher education institutions are, to a large extent, overlooked by government policymakers. In countries which fall within this category, the state benefits from the private sector absorbing the excess demand for higher education, without having to pay any subsidies to the private sector. Basically, there is a remote relationship between the State and the private education sector. Overall, the private sector is ignored. The demand-absorbing type of private institution, discussed above, is mostly the result of this lax regulatory growth policy (Levy, 2008). Since then governments have given more attention to the private sector.

In nations which fall within Zumeta's 'central planning' mode, the private sector is recognised and receives the same treatment as the public sector. It plays its role in a planned higher education system. The distinction between the public and private sectors is barely discernible. Private institutions have their own allocation within the main higher education budget; they are thus forced to follow government regulations. Zumeta suggests that this kind of control makes the private sector quasi-public, making it less flexible in meeting market demands and less able to diversify its activities.

In Zumeta's 'market competitive' mode, the State plays less of a planning and regulatory role. The State employs market forces to guide the allocations of programmes and resources. In this case, the State encourages competition between public and private higher education institutions. The State, in effect, allows the public and private institutions to operate in a similar environment. Student aids and grants in these States are portable, giving the student freedom of choice. The student can choose either a private or a public institution, since the aid and support from the State will be there, regardless of the student's choice.

Nevertheless, there are some cases which demonstrate changes in the Government's stance toward the private sector. In Japan, for example, after three decades of the existence of private higher education, the Government recognised its importance, increasing subsidies to this sector. The State policy chose to support private higher education institutions financially, however, with some control over enrolment quotas. Private higher education became a part of government planning (Goodman & Yonezawa, 2007). But since the late 1980s, the market model has been adopted in the Japanese higher education system. Georgia is another example where the government stance towards the private sector of higher education changed from being laissez-faire

towards greater central planning immediately after its independence from the Soviet Union (Pachuashvili, 2011). Pachuashvili (2011, p. 404) suggests that factors which shape government policies towards private higher education are multiple and range from “political economic to those historical and cultural”.

Policies influencing private institutions range from a government’s legislative and regulatory frameworks on the private higher education sector, to those related to funding the private sector (Zumeta, 2011). It should be noted that not all private institutions, especially profit-making ones, operate within the regulatory or accreditation system of the country in which they operate. They therefore offer something which they call ‘higher education’ but it is not officially recognised by government.

In his discussion of the relation between governments and private higher education, Zumeta (1996, 2011) suggests that governments’ support can be both direct and indirect. Therefore, policies do not have to be particularly for the private sector to affect its growth. Government can affect the private higher education sector through its policies for the public sector (Zumeta, 1996, 2001), such as policies for public expansion, or for tuition fees (Levy, 2008; Zumeta, 1992, 1996, 2011). Governments can promote the private sector’s growth through reducing the tuition fee gap between public and private institutions, and by exempting private institutions and students from paying taxes (Zumeta, 2011). Geiger (1986) observed that governments, in countries like Belgium and Holland, treat public and private higher education institutions equally. He even classified the private sector as “parallel private sector”.

Also, there is not necessarily a correlation between government financial support and control. In countries like Thailand for example, the Government places more regulation on the private sector than on the public (Levy, 2009). Finally, as Levy has suggested, “Private higher education’s roles emerge mostly unanticipated, not following a broad preconception or systemic design” (2003, p. 2). Kensir et al. (2010) suggest that the local context and the governing framework distinguish the level of the private sector from the public. This leads us to conclude that we cannot predict the role of private higher education in Saudi Arabia based on other countries’ experiences, especially since there are nation-specific political structures, culture, and society for the country.

Conclusion

The chapter first presented the complexity involved in defining private higher education. This is because the boundaries between public and private higher education institutions are becoming more blurred. I examined the concept of privatisation in higher education studies, and the case of Saudi Arabia with reference to five perspectives of private higher education, namely funding, ownership, orientation, function and roles, and governance. I explored what these different perspectives meant for the private higher education sector in other countries and how it was relevant to the Saudi context.

In terms of funding private higher education, the institutions, in contrast to the free public sector, heavily rely on tuition fees with limited support from the Government in the form of scholarships. In terms of orientation, these private institutions are more concerned with teaching rather than research or vocational training. In terms of ownership, private institutions are owned by private investors or non-profit organisations. In terms of functions and roles of private institutions, three assumptions were explored respectively: wider access, different forms, or higher quality, and I will further explore these three assumptions in later chapters. In terms of governance, the private sector is under the close supervision of the Government and this will also be further explored in Chapter 10.

These perspectives will appear again in later chapters. I will also bring in data collected from my empirical work, in order to enrich my discussions from certain perspectives. For instance, I will come back to the issue of functions and roles in Chapter 6, with particular focuses on admission, teaching, and learning. I will further discuss the issue of orientation in Chapter 7 with particular reference to the labour market in the Saudi context; I will also focus on the relationship between the private sector and the Government in Chapter 10.

In the next chapter I will move on to provide a general introduction to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in terms of its demographics, economy, and the labour market.

PART II

Chapter 3

The Saudi Arabian Context

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the context in which the research takes place. It provides a brief historical overview of the Kingdom which only became a unified nation in 1932. The founding Saud monarchy's close partnership with the Wahhabi religious movement underlines the profound impact of Islam on all aspects of life in the Kingdom. The country's rapid population growth is analyzed. The economic development of the country associated with the discovery of oil is described with some elaboration of the Saudi government's Five Year Development Plans. This is followed by a description of the effect of this sudden wealth on the country's social fabric. Finally, the chapter introduces the structure of the Saudi labour market, the ratio of nationals to expatriates, unemployment rates and the role of women in the economy.

The Islamic State

Saudi Arabia occupies about three-fourths of the Arabian Peninsula. With a land area of 830,000 square miles, it is about one-third the size of the continental US. It is bordered by Iraq, Kuwait, and Jordan to the north; by Yemen and Oman to the south; the UAE, Qatar and the Arab Gulf to the east and by the Red Sea to the west. While most of its land mass is rugged desert, there is a central plateau and a narrow western coastal plain bordered by high mountains. Once at the centre of the caravan routes, Saudi Arabia is strategically located between three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Riyadh, the largest city, with a population of about six million and the country's capital, lies on the central plateau. The second largest city in Saudi Arabia is the Red Sea port of

Jeddah. With a population of about four million, the city is the gateway for Muslim pilgrims arriving by air or sea to perform Hajj (the Pilgrimage) or any other liturgical duties in the holy cities of Islam, Makkah and Medina. Jeddah is the country's commercial capital, with a cosmopolitan population and outlook developed through centuries of contact with pilgrims from all parts of the Muslim world. North of Jeddah is the industrial city of Yanbu. Saudi Arabia is the world's largest oil producer and has the world's largest deposits of oil. Petroleum and its derivatives are found in the country's eastern region where the cities of Alkhobar, Dammam and the industrial city of Jubail are situated. Other centres of population include Tabuk in the north, Abha and Khamis Mushait in the south and Buraidah, the capital of Al-Qaseem province, in the central region(Al-Farsi, 1998).

The origin of the Saudi state lies in the historical partnership that evolved between the ruling clan of Al-Saud and the puritanical Muslim movement that emerged in the 18th century in central Arabia. That movement is based on the teachings of the religious scholar Mohamed ibn Abdul-Wahhab--1703-92 (Al-Rasheed, 2002). The essence of Wahhabism is a fierce monotheism and the indivisibility of state and religion. It came about as a result of the perceived ignorance of the populace in the eighteenth century of true Islam. It rejected the opulence of 'official' Islam as represented by the Khalifate of the Ottomans Empire that ruled the region from Istanbul. It declared 'Jihad' on those Muslims who were perceived to have deviated from the true path. The movement found in a local emir, one Muhammad bin Saud (d. 1765) a willing partner (Al-Rasheed, 2002).

The political religious partnership between Al-Saud family and Wahhabism went through three incarnations (Champion, 2003). The first rose in 1744 and ended in the second decade of the 19th century. Its demise came because of the missionary zeal of this fundamentalist movement. It incurred the wrath of the Ottomans Empire and was crushed in 1818 by Egyptian troops commanded by the sons of Muhammad Ali, the ruler of Egypt. The second Saudi state established itself in 1824, but was defeated in 1891 by the rise of a rival clan, the Al-Rasheeds from northern Arabia, who had the support of the Ottomans(Champion, 2003).

It was Abdul-Aziz ibn Saud (1876-1953), a direct descendant of the first Saudi rulers, who laid the basis of the present Saudi Arabian state. In a daring raid in 1902, he led a small group of followers to capture Riyadh and defeat his enemies, the Al-Rasheeds. He

declared the establishment of his state on 8th January 1926. This was internationally recognised in 1927. By 1932 he managed to unify the country through further conquests and political manoeuvring and established an absolute monarchy: the present Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2002). The partnership with Wahhabism continued and the new state was ruled, and continues to be ruled, under the Islamic Shari'a law (the code set out in the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet.) The Islamic religion, as interpreted by Wahhabism, therefore colours every aspect of life in the Kingdom.

Wahabbism is a crucial factor to consider when analysing education in general and the role of women in particular in Saudi society. Underpinned by age old tribal conventions, the puritanical teaching of that creed strictly limited the role of women to family and child care. Women's education was limited to religious studies. Their mobility in the wider society was also restricted (Baki, 2004; Hamdan, 2005) Islam is the only officially recognized religion, and other faiths are not publicly tolerated. Its importance as a factor in governmental decisions cannot be underestimated. The State justifies this by the special significance of the country as the birthplace of Islam and the existence of the religion's holiest shrines in the Kingdom.

The other significance of the country lies in its role as a major producer of oil. The substantial wealth generated by the oil boom since the early 1970s has allowed Saudi Arabia to undergo rapid development in all material fields. Yet this rapid development has highlighted the contradictions felt by a society that needs all of its human resources, yet strictly limits female employment. Adding to the problem, Saudi Arabia has been forced to import a disproportionate number of foreign workers, while a significant number of its own nationals (women) are forced to remain at home by social convention. Seen through a modern socio-economic lens, it is easy to feel that there is something wrong somewhere. Surely, it would be argued, the state should introduce measures to deal with this 'problem'. It is not so simple.

Perhaps the current social situation in the Kingdom today is the product of centuries of isolation underpinned by a fundamental adherence to a religious doctrine that has been perceived as "pure Islam". It is buttressed by a proud, paternalistic and tribal code that sees constancy as a virtue and change as fraught with danger. These social attitudes are organic, embedded into the very fabric of the society. They are entrenched so deeply that even so called 'westernised' Saudis feel a degree of comfort in them. The all-powerful religious establishment is vigilant for any sign of dilution of these social

norms. This religious establishment is a powerful and visible presence in the daily lives of all Saudis. Even in an absolute monarchy, where the monarch's pronouncements are unchallengeable, the ruler cannot force change. Successive Kings have been adept at steering social legislations in a manner that does not antagonise the religious establishment or public sensitivities(Champion, 2003). The question is can the current social reality of the Kingdom co-exist with its emerging economic reality, in a world where fast change is the norm not the exception? This is important as context, this tension between state, faith, culture and the demand for rapid and transformative economic development.

As an absolute monarchy, the central institution of the country's governance is the monarch. The King directly administers the country through his governors. Eventually, bureaucratic complexities made it necessary to develop a modern central administration. In 1953, a Council of Ministers appointed by and headed by the King was established. Decisions were taken after consultation with senior members of the ruling family and the religious establishment. In 1992, The Basic Law of Government was promulgated and the National Consultative Assembly was established. This body of 150 members appointed by the King is charged with supervising government departments as well as initiating certain types of legislation. A tribal tradition that survived the modernisation of the Kingdom gives access by ordinary citizens to high officials through direct petitioning. In discussing the governance of the country it is also vitally important to emphasis the doctrine that underpins the whole structure--the indivisibility of state and religion. The religious establishment in the Kingdom plays a significant role in shaping the laws that govern the country (Vassiliev,1998).

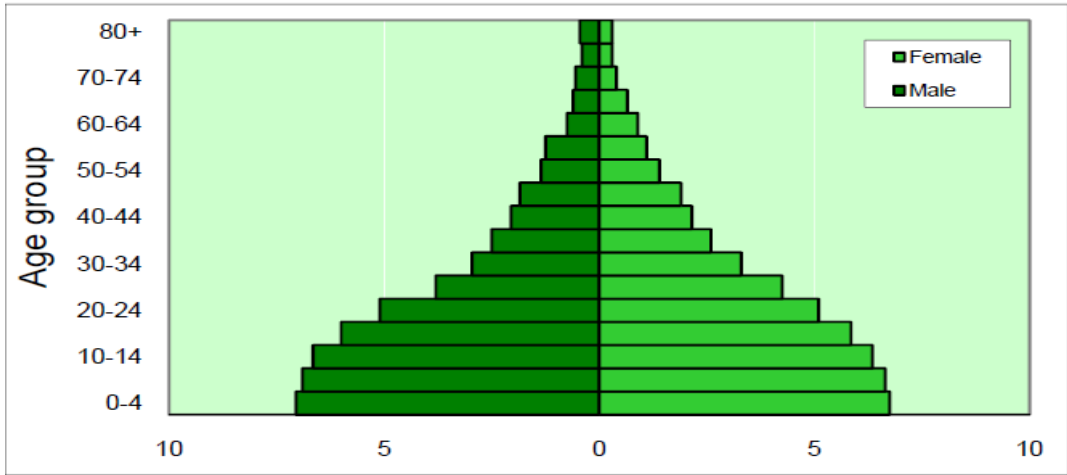
Demographics

According to the Central Department of Statistics and Information (CDSI), in 2004 Saudi Arabia had a population of 22,678,262 million of which 16,527,340 million were Saudi citizens while 6,150,922 were non-Saudi nationals which represented 72.9 % and 27.1 % of the population, respectively. With a growth rate of 3.2 %, population increased to 27,136,977 million in 2010. Of that, 18,707,576 million were Saudi nationals, representing 68.9% of the total population while expatriates increased to 8,429,401 million, representing 31.1 % of the population (CDSI, 2011). The gender split

in the population is almost evenly divided: 50.1% male and 49.9 female (CDSI, 2011). As illustrated in Figure 1 below, Saudi Arabia is a young country. According to government statistics of 2007, 58.4% of the population were under the age of twenty five (Ministry Of Planning, 2009).

The UNDP's (2009) Arab Human Development Report states that the fertility rate (births per woman) for Saudi Arabia was 3.8 in 2005--one of the highest levels in the Arab world. What is remarkable about this fertility rate is that it is the same level found in countries in the UN's "low income" category yet the KSA is obviously one of the world's wealthy nations. It must also be noted that this high fertility rate is not linked with high mortality rates as in poorer countries: life expectancy in the KSA was 71 years in 2000. This high population growth has been accompanied by social changes this traditional rural society has never experienced before. According to the World Bank, in 1970 49% of the Kingdom's population was urbanised(World Bank, 2002). This percentage rose to 86% in 2000. It is estimated that by 2015, the percentage of Saudis living in cities with a population of over one million may reach 30% (Cordesman; 2003). Even if due to urbanisation and education, the birth rate declines to a moderate 2%, Saudi Arabia's population is expected to increase to 31 million by 2020 (Cordesman; 2003). The high birth rate, and a low mortality rate, implies increasing pressure on the health, education and employment resources of the country.

Figure 1: Saudi Population Percentages by Gender and Age Group:2009



Source: Ministry of Planning (2009, p. 192)

The Saudi Economy

When the new Kingdom emerged in 1932, its economy relied heavily on income from the large number of Muslim pilgrims visiting the holy places in Makkah and Madinah. A simple agricultural base complemented by desert husbandry provided a further modest element to the country's income(Champion, 2003). Economic activities with the outside world were largely confined to the neighbouring countries centred on the coastal cities of the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf. In 1936 oil was discovered in the eastern region of the Kingdom and by 1938, when commercial production of crude oil commenced, the country was given the key to a prosperous future. The Second World War put a brake on the exploitation of oil, but intensive production was resumed in 1946 and continued to grow, dominating the Kingdom's economy. The country sits on almost a quarter of the world's proven reserves of oil (Ramady, 2005). Today, 90% of the country's export earnings come from oil. A huge petrochemical sector has been developed, centred in the coastal cities of Jubail in the east and Yanbu in the west (Al-Farsi, 1998). Substantial resources have been devoted to the development of the religious sites, thus increasing the capacity to host foreign pilgrims and visitors. Non-religious tourism to the picturesque parts of the country have been encouraged (Al-Farsi, 1998)

The economic health of the country has not been characterised by steady dramatic growth over the past six decades, but by periods of recession as well as periods of "tafra". Tafra, literally meaning "the take off", is a term used locally to describe the explosive growth that took place as a result of the dramatic rise in oil prices and the resulting increase in the country's income. The most dramatic of these "tafras" accompanied the quadrupling of crude oil prices in 1970s. This, however, was followed by a period of recession resulting from the oil embargo in 1973 and the aftermath of the Gulf War in Kuwait in the 1990s. This was followed by a second oil boom between 2002-2008(Cordesman, 2003;Abdelkarim,1999). In this period, oil prices exceeded \$100 a barrel. Nevertheless, that increase in wealth was not free from challenges—including unemployment among Saudis, inflation and lack of diversification in the general economy(Saif, 2009). Since government spending is by far the main dynamo of the economy, the ebb and flow of oil income directly impacts the economic health of the country's institutions.

In a country like Saudi Arabia, where traditions and constancy are perceived to be the bedrock of society, not only by the rulers, but also by the vast majority of the ruled, globalisation is seen as a mixed blessing. Traditional social norms in general, and education, in particular, have had to interact with the global marketplace of ideas and face the challenges that this interaction presents. In the recent past, the Kingdom was not immune from the effect of globalisation and the new trend towards a knowledge-based economy. Saudi Arabia formally joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in December 2005 (Abdul-Ghafour & Hanware, 2005), after negotiations that began twelve years earlier, with the world body's forerunner, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). This resulted in the liberalisation of the Kingdom's trade and it accelerated its integration into the world economy.

The Economy and the Five Year Development Plans

The central plank of the Saudi government's economic thinking is to reduce dependence on income from oil (Ministry Of Planning, 2009). It seeks to direct the country's economy through a series of five-year plans. Initially, advice was sought from foreign development planners. International organizations, such as the United Nations, assisted in early planning. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Riyadh focused on the technical training of Saudi nationals. Then the need for a systematic mechanism was felt and in 1960, the Supreme Planning Board of Saudi Arabia was established. In 1965, this evolved into the Central Planning Organisation which in 1975 became the Ministry of Planning. Since then, the Ministry has been responsible for the development of the economic direction of the country and has been the primary author of Saudi Arabia's Five Year Development Plans (Al Farsi, 1998). The first of these covered the period 1970–1975. Eight more plans have been written since then and implemented. Though not all plans were completely implemented, they have been guiding the country's development throughout the past four decades.

From the beginning, because of the country's lack of trained labour, it became apparent that these plans were unlikely to be fully implemented. The import of expatriate labour, on a massive scale, thus became a necessity. In 1984, the World Bank reported: "Nowhere outside the capital-surplus oil countries had massive immigration been so impressively utilised to carry out what is possibly the largest scale transformation of a developing economy in social history. For this reason, the Saudi labour market has undergone fundamental changes in a short period of time" (World Bank, 1984, p. 4). Although the development of human resources has been an aim of Saudi planners since the First Development Plan, it seems that it did not become a priority until the Third Development Plan (1980-1985). The two earlier plans focused on developing the infrastructure of the country. With the realisation that the country lacked qualified manpower to implement those plans, a substantial increase in expatriate manpower became inevitable. Simultaneously, there was a significant increase in educational facilities at all levels, with concentration on vocational training. Construction of schools expanded significantly, followed by an increase in enrolment at all academic levels. It was hoped that the output of these educational facilities would satisfy the labour market and thus lessen the country's reliance on imported labour (Ministry of Planning, 2001).

The Third Development Plan (1980–1985) changed spending emphasis. Spending on infrastructure declined, but it rose markedly on education, health, and social services. The planned diversification and development of the productive sectors of the economy--such as primary industries--did not meet its targets. However, the two major new industrial cities of Jubail and Yanbu were largely completed. Within the Third Plan, there was an emphasis on the management skills of Saudi nationals (Al-Farsi, 1998). Saudi citizens were encouraged, through incentives, to enrol in training courses. Concurrently, the private sector was encouraged to expand training programmes and government loans were made dependent upon the provision of full-time training schemes for Saudi citizens (Al-Farsi, 1998). The objectives for manpower development were: a substantial increase in the size of trained Saudi manpower available to the market; an increase in productivity in all sectors; the deployment of trained nationals in sectors with the greatest potential for growth; and reduced dependence on foreign manpower. Other objectives of the Plan included diversifying the economy, reforming government administration and encouraging and developing the private sector (Ministry of Planning, 2000).

The Fourth Development Plan (1985-1990), while consolidating the previous three, emphasised several other noticeable themes, one of which was a commitment to reduce the number of unskilled and manual labour foreign workers in the Kingdom by more than half a million. It also aimed to continue the development of Saudi manpower, through the evaluation of education and training programmes and curricula. An emphasis was placed on modification of curricula to conform to Islamic Shari'a law, as well as the changing needs of society and the requirements of the development process. In addition, the private sector's contribution to the economy was encouraged. This sector expanded and began investing heavily in construction, agriculture and industry, thus contributing to the country's non-oil productive resources. Foreign companies were also allowed to operate in the KSA, in partnership with private or public sector enterprises ((Ministry of Planning, 2000).

The Fifth Development Plan (1990-1995) reaffirmed the objectives established in prior Development Plans. Again, one of its objectives was "...to form a productive national workforce by encouraging citizens to avail themselves of the benefits of the infrastructure and institutions provided for them by the state--ensuring their livelihood and rewarding them on the basis of their work." (Al-Farsi, 1998, p.164). It was during

the period of this Fifth Development Plan, that the private sector was expected to undertake most of the growth in employment.

The Sixth Development Plan (1996–2000) attached particular significance to the much-cherished objective of “Saudisation” (Ministry of Planning, 1995). “Saudisation” in the words of Alzalabani (2002, p. 132) “refers broadly to the need to replace non-Saudi manpower with Saudi nationals in the workforce. Thus, it aims to encourage Saudi citizens to take a more active role in the economic and social development of their country.” The goal of Saudisation was to reduce the number of non-Saudi workers and to encourage firms to increase the employment of Saudi nationals (Al-Hamid, 2005). It requires companies to have 30% of their workforce to be Saudis if they have twenty or more employees in their companies. To achieve this goal, a range of measures was introduced. A freeze on applications to hire new foreign workers or renew residence permits for existing workers was put into effect. Non-compliance incurred exclusion from participation in government tenders. It also incurred exclusion from access to government subsidies and facilities (Madhi and Barrientos, 2003). As employers were not fulfilling the “Saudisation” quota required by the Government, in 2011 the “Netaqat” project was introduced as another method to force the private sector to employ Saudi nationals. Under this programme, companies are categorised to a scheme of four colours: red, yellow, green, and premium. Companies are labelled under one of these four categories, based on the level of Saudisation they fulfil. Companies under premium, then green categories, receive more incentives and facilities than the other two categories—the red category being the worst (Ministry of Labour, 2012).

The Seventh Development Plan (2000-2004) is not much different from the Sixth. However, it focused more on economic diversification and a greater role for the private sector in the Saudi economy. The Plan called for 95% of jobs for Saudis to be created by the private sector. Therefore, educational planners faced the challenge of facilitating the supply of graduates required to satisfy the specific needs of the private sector. In particular, it was observed that female graduates had studied subjects —such as education—more suited for employment by the public sector (Ministry of Planning, 2000),

The Eighth Development Plan (2005-2009) again focused on economic diversification as well as education. It also marked a major shift in focus towards the inclusion of

women in the workforce. The Plan called for establishing new universities and new colleges with technical specializations. It argued that privatization, and the development of a knowledge-based economy and tourism, would help promote the goal of economic diversification (Ministry of Planning, 2009). Clearly training and education have been of major concern to the Government. Without success in these fields, it is difficult to see how the economy can be diversified and reliance on the export of oil substantially reduced, let alone enhancing employment opportunities for its citizens.

The Saudi Labour Market

An examination of the structure of the Saudi labour market helps underscore the possible contribution that private higher education can make. This requires a review of the “national” and “non-national” elements of the workforce, both male and female. As of 2008, the labour force in Saudi Arabia consisted of 8 million workers; 3.8 million of whom were Saudis and about 4.2 million were non-Saudi (Ministry of Planning, 2009). As Table 2 below shows, Saudis’ employment in the public sector is higher than that in the private sector. The situation is reversed in the private sector where non-Saudis predominate. Even in 2004, the private sector sourced more than half its workforce from outside the country.

Table 2: Saudi and Non-Saudi Workforce Distribution—Public and Private Sectors

	1999		2004	
	No Workers	of % Distribution	No Workers	of % Distribution
Total labour Force	7,176.3	100.0	7,504.9	100.0
Saudis	3,172.9	44.2	3,999.2	53.2
Non-Saudis	4,003.4	55.8	3,514.7	46.8
Total labour Government Sector	916	12.8	923.3	12.4
Saudis	716.5	78.2	806.1	86.5
Non-Saudis	199.7	21.8	126.2	13.5
Total Labour at Private Sector	6,260.1	87.2	6,572.6	87.6
Saudis	2,422.7	38.7	3,184.1	48.4
Non-Saudis	3,837.4	61.3	3,388.5	51.6

Sources: Ministry of Planning (2001) and SAMA (2004, p313)

However, looking at the occupational structure of the labour market will give an indication of the skill base of Saudi nationals and determine the skills required by the market. Table 3 below displays the manpower structure of Saudis and non-Saudis, by major occupations.

Table 3: Manpower Structure by Occupation and Nationality

Occupational Group	Percentage Share			
	Total	Saudis	Non-Saudis	Share of Saudis
Scientific and technical professions	11.8	11.7	11.9	42.3
Managers administrative	1.7	2.9	0.7	76.8
Clerical	7.2	12.1	3.1	75.7
Sales personnel	7.2	5.9	8.4	35.8
Service workers	31.2	46.9	18.4	67.1
Agricultural workers	8.4	8.7	8.2	52.8
Production and similar workers	32.5	11.9	49.5	16.5
All occupational groups (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	
All occupational groups (number)	7,830,143	3,516,393	4,313,750	44.9

Source: Ministry of Economy and Planning- Central Department of Statistics, Obtained from Table 5.6, UNDP, Human Development Report – Saudi Arabia, 2003, p.82)

The high dependency on expatriate labour is not unique to the KSA, but is common to almost all the Arabian Gulf countries, because they all developed in a similar way: accelerated development fuelled by increasing oil revenue. In all those states the lack of sufficient competent national human resources was a problem facing their governments, forcing them to import capability from outside (Donn & Almanthri; 2010). Dependency on foreign labour was not a temporary one; rather, the number of expatriates employed has increased consistently year on year. Alharthi (2000) examined the complexity of the phenomenon and suggested economic and socio-cultural factors behind the high percentage of non-nationals in the labour market. Some of these will be discussed in the section below.

Unemployment among Saudi Nationals

Paradoxically, in spite of the massive petro-driven economic developments that have taken place and the huge expansion of the private sector, the KSA is bedevilled by a high unemployment rate. The unemployment rate for Saudis has been estimated to be 10% of the total labour force of which 6.8% are male and 29.6% are female (Ministry Of Planning, 2009). Nevertheless, this rate varies among different age groups, being the highest among ages of 20-24 (Ministry of Planning, 2009) Unemployment among Saudi nationals is unlike unemployment in most other countries where it usually results from poor economic conditions and the general poverty of a country. This cannot be said of Saudi Arabia. Al-Shammari (2009) provides a list of reasons behind Saudi nationals unemployment based on the work of Ghaban et al, 2002; Al-sheikh, 2001; and Al-Gaith and Al-Ma'ashouq, 1997:

- The massive presence of roughly 4 million non-Saudi workers in the Saudi labour market reduces employment opportunities for Saudis
- The reduction in the country's annual economic growth rate accompanied with the country's high birthrates
- The Government sector's declining role as the major employer of Saudis
- The negative cultural inferiority attitude towards certain occupations in the labour market
- The mismatch between training and education outcomes and labour market skills and demand
- The lack of accurate up-to date information and statistics on the labour market
- The inconsistency of government bodies regulating and supervising the labour market
- The low wages level paid to Saudis entering the private sector

Generally, it is claimed that Saudi graduates lack the skills and knowledge that meet the requirements of the labour market (Yamani, 1997). This is an important factor as are gender discrepancies (lack of women in the labour force) and the large amount of immigrant labour. It has been argued that the Kingdom's education and training system has failed to meet the needs of the economy with half of the Kingdom's universities focusing on religious studies and only 12% of Saudi students graduating in engineering and science, while 42.2% graduate in social and religious studies (Diwan & Girgis, 2002).

In addition to educational qualifications, Ramady (2005) suggested reasons related to Saudi attitudes which make them less favoured in the private sector compared to foreign labour. The rapid increase in oil prices in the seventies or as it is called “Tafra” was not without its own dramatic effect on society in Saudi Arabia Abdelkarim (1999). A massive programme of economic development implemented at a rapid rate in a traditional, conservative society inevitably leads to social upheaval. One manifestation of this in KSA is the migration from rural areas to cities and urban centres, in the hope of better education and better careers. Thoria Al-Turki (2006) also found the oil boom to have contributed to reshaping the identity of the Saudi citizen, particularly in the way in which Saudis see themselves and perceive others. Algothami (2004) concluded that Saudi society became “schizophrenic” as citizens left vocational and manual work for expatriates to do, while they became ‘bosses’ giving orders and demanding to be obeyed. Many Saudis took advantage of the “guarantor / sponsor system” in which Saudi sponsors receive a percentage of the wages or salaries of foreign workers who they are sponsoring. This allows those Saudis to generate wealth without actively involving themselves in any work. This was also possible because the country did not permit foreigners to own enterprises in the country. Some Saudis generated wealth by speculating in real estate. Thus, sudden wealth might help us later in understanding some attitudes of Saudi nationals in the society.

Women’s Participation in the Labour Market

It is worth mentioning that Saudi female participation in the labour market is low, especially when compared with women in other Arab countries. Al-Munajjed’s (2010) study shows that women in Saudi Arabia currently represent only 14.4 % of the national workforce. In the Gulf region women constitute 59.9% of the workforce in the UAE, 42.49 % in Kuwait, 36.4 % in Qatar and 34.9 % for Bahrain (Al-Munajjed’s ,2010). Women’s participation in the government sector is higher than in the private sector being 62% and 38% respectively. Within the public sector, women are mostly found in the education, health, and social service sectors constituting 88%, 9%, and 1% respectively (Al-Humaid, 2002). According to Ramady (2005), high enrolment by women in education, is due to the greater employment opportunities this field offered. In the words of Al-Hamid and Jamjoom: “There was an urgent need for female graduates in education to work in the schools whose number were increasing day in and

day out as a result of the spread of women's education.”(Al-Hamid & Jamjoom, 2009, p. 761). Additionally, Al- Munajjed (2010) suggests that this pattern could also be a result of sex segregation by occupation. In Saudi Arabia, women are concentrated in certain professions that are seen as feminine (Al- Munajjed, 2010). Therefore, the education sector includes the largest proportion of females participating in the governmental labor market (Al-Hamid & Jamjoom, 2009; Al- Munajjed, 2010). This proportion reached around 87.6% in 2002 of the total number of women working in the Government sector.

While the Government sector was recruiting female employees, recruitment of women by the public sector has been decreasing over the years. According to the Ministry of Civil Services records, the number of female applicants for teaching posts in KSA reached 73,500 when the total number of available posts was 7,710 (Al- Munajjed,2010). This means that 89% of applicants for job posts will not find a job, which constitutes a serious burden on the labor market. This coincides with a more recent study by Al- Munajjed (2010) which reveals that women do not feel optimistic about their future in the labour market. According to the Al- Hamid and Jamjoom study (2009), there is a current saturation in the market, in particular with unemployed female teachers. The private sector has been charged, through government policies, to provide job opportunities because of the saturation of the public sector. However, the Government realised that the labour market's absorption capacity is not the only factor affecting the women's employment in the private sector. Additionally, they were found not to have sufficient education and training as needed by the labour market (Al-Hamid & Jamjoom, 2009). Al-Munajjed (2010; p.11) for example, criticised the education system for not preparing women for the labour market:

“The Saudi educational system simply is not providing girls with the skills and background they need to successfully compete in the labour market. The current educational system relies on rote learning and does not sufficiently promote analysis, skills development, problem solving, communication, and creativity. In addition, there is a shortage of appropriate education in areas vital to the development of the new knowledge-based economy, such as math, science, technology, and computer literacy. As a result, Saudi women are not sufficiently empowered to participate in digital society.”

In 2004, the Shura Council called for a comprehensive national strategy to address the expansion of education, work and training areas for Saudi women in a way that suits their nature and does not conflict with the Islamic Sharia laws (Al-Hamid & Jamjoom,

2009). Perhaps, economic planners and policymakers started to realise that the recruitment and training of women could help solve the difficulties of Saudising the workforce. Such educational expansion would also help to satisfy the rising expectations of the increasing number of women who will begin graduating from secondary schools, colleges and universities. This focus may have been compounded by the tendency of girls to excel academically in secondary schools, with proportionately more females than males graduating.

Ramady (2005) suggests that the kind of educational programmes available to women are still limited. Al-Hamid & Jamjoom (2009) suggest widening women's participation in the labour market by tailoring programmes to specializations needed in the labor market. They also suggested using technology to provide distance work for women and also for expanding the scope of careers open to women. However, they place more emphasis on preparing women for the labour market through education and training institutions.

In Al- Munajjed's words:

“The national system of education is failing to prepare Saudi women for competitive roles in the labor force limiting them to traditional fields of work such as teaching and work in the service sector” (Al-Munajjed 2010. p.3)

Nevertheless, the extent to which private higher education is addressing the unemployment issue in Saudi Arabia will be the focus of our discussion in Chapter 8.

Conclusion

As has been seen, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia faces a unique combination of challenges-- historical, cultural, social, demographic and economic. These challenges each have a direct impact on the development of and need for a better higher education system. The country's founding dynasty--the Saud family--formed an enduring partnership with the Wahhabi religious movement, a strict interpreter of Islamic law. That relationship and the Kingdom's role as the Custodian of the Holy Places (Makkah, Medina) has meant that religion has a profound effect on all aspects of Saudi life including education and economic development. The monarchy, which rules within a centralized state apparatus, must at all times balance deep cultural traditions with the need for rapid, transformative change.

As the world's leading oil producer, the Kingdom has amassed great wealth but economic development has been subject to the unpredictable cycle of rising and falling oil prices, and to inflation and unemployment. The oil boom ("tafra") in the 70s and 80s led to a huge influx of foreign labour--necessary for the rapid building of a modern infrastructure. But that came with a high cost--continuing unemployment among Saudi nationals. As a consequence of sudden prosperity and high levels of spending by the Government, Saudis shunned manual and vocational work--everyone wanted to "be a boss." The Government came to be the country's largest employer through an expanding and not always efficient public sector. When oil revenues declined, the Government placed new emphasis on jobs for Saudis in the private sector. The Seventh Development Plan (2000-04) called for 95% of Saudi jobs to be in the private sector, somewhat unrealistically since more than half the labour force remains expatriate. Contributing to this unemployment is a high birth rate and a low mortality rate. Nearly 60% of the population is under 25.

Lack of high quality education has ill prepared Saudis for private sector work. Half of those who graduate from the higher education system have majored in social or religious studies--for which there is little need and few have scientific, technical or management training. The market tends to view Saudis as unqualified, lacking in specialised skills. Cultural factors again are in evidence with the role of Saudi women. Historically, women were given little or no education, had limited social mobility and no possibility of employment. Even today, woman only comprise 14% of the workforce,

low even by Gulf standards. Now, women are being educated in huge numbers (as will be seen in the next chapter) but there are still few places for them in the job world. In conclusion, there are many challenges before the Kingdom. A key to addressing them will be the role of higher education--public and private--which will be the topics of the next two chapters

Chapter 4

Higher Education in Saudi Arabia

- Emergence, Development and Challenges

Introduction

This chapter provides a sketch of the Saudi Education system-its emergence, development and challenges. It begins with a brief review of the development of the education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The structure of the system of education will be presented, followed by a discussion of the different forms of institutions it currently constitutes. In terms of its present challenges, I particularly focus on the mismatch between the development of the general and the higher education systems. I highlight the capacity issue facing the higher education sector, I also examine the role of the private sector in this regard.

Origins of Education in Saudi Arabia

Since the emergence of the modern Kingdom in 1932, Saudi Arabia has undergone rapid and dramatic changes in the economic, social, and most importantly educational spheres. Before 1932, few people had the opportunity to acquire basic skills such as reading and writing. These skills were offered and taught only in religious institutions, which were known as ‘katateeb’, as well as in mosques. An organised educational system known as ‘madrasah’ then evolved in major regional centres such as Makkah, Medina, and Jeddah--cities that were historically under Turkish control (Al-Hamid et al, 2007) . Before the emergence of a unified country, conditions varied from region to region. While the western region of the Hejaz was relatively stable, the Najd, in the central region, and the regions of the East were rife with instability and tribal disputes. Neglect by the controlling Ottoman Empire, which prevailed until the First World War,

contributed in general to what amounted to the total absence of a nationwide educational system. Economic and social conditions were not conducive to any form of formal education. People's daily lives were a constant struggle for survival, leaving little time or inclination to think of education.

According to Al-Sunbul et al., (1998), before the establishment of the Directorate of Education, education in KSA went through three phases: traditional inherited education, organized Ottoman public education, and private education. The traditional inherited education was a type of education that was delivered in mosques (that is, two Haram Mosques in Makkah and Madinah) and in 'katateeb'. Teaching in mosques covered the subjects of history, religion, and literature, while instruction in 'katateeb' focused on the alphabet, reading, writing, and memorising verses from the Qur'an. The Ottoman government, on the other hand, supervised the organized Ottoman public education system, with Turkish as the main language of instruction. Under this system, pupils spent three years in primary education, while secondary education students had a choice of either three or five years of education. Lastly, private education was managed and financed by the private sector. In essence, it followed traditional education guidelines, but provided subjects other than the purely religious ones. Schools of this type were established through efforts by individuals and financed by donations. The first school of this type was established by a man from India who recognised the need for establishing a proper school for the Indian community. The school had a curriculum based on what was used in Islamic schools in India. This type of private schools prospered in both the eastern and western regions, while the central region of Najd remained dependent on the traditional type of teaching (Al-Sunbul et al., 1997).

These three phases characterized the educational landscape of the country before the rise of the modern Saudi state. Among the first things the founding monarch, King Abdul Aziz, did after capturing the western region of Hejaz was the establishment of the Directorate of Education on March 16, 1926 (Al-Aqil, 2005). The role of this directorate was to set policies, rules and regulations for the educational system of the country. The King began to establish a modern political system to govern the country, by setting up a number of ministries. In 1954, the Directorate of Education became the Ministry of Education and was entrusted with the task of unifying the education system of the country. The Directorate supervised a number of educational institutions, both public and private (Al-Aqil, 2005). However, there was still no unified curriculum, with

each educational institution having its own. A number of schools imported their curriculum from neighbouring Arab countries. The main effort of the Ministry of Education was directed at establishing public schools in all regions of the country. Nevertheless, the Ministry was faced with the challenge of finding enough qualified teachers. Setting up enough schools to service the increasing demand for education in the diverse regions of the country was a daunting challenge (MOHE, 2010). To operate, the Ministry had to import all its resources from the neighbouring countries. The Ministry faced not only a lack of teachers, but also the absence of basic equipment to publish or print educational materials. The situation was brought on largely due to the Government's religious orientation, which forced the Ministry to develop its learning resources internally (Al-Dawoud,1996).

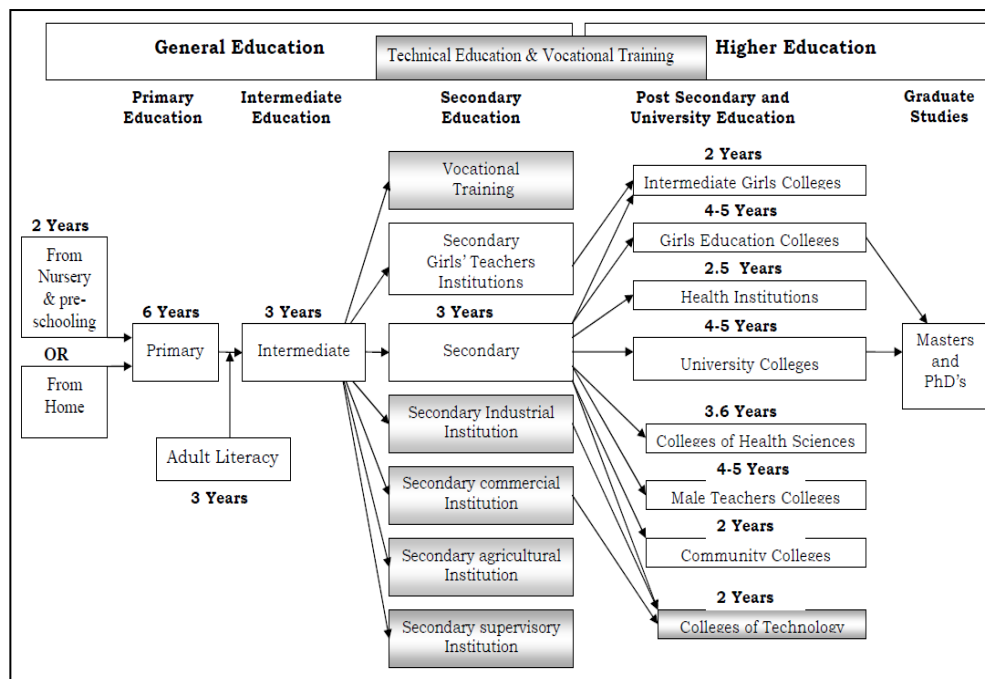
In 2002, the Ministry was renamed the Ministry of Education and Teaching, and it oversees kindergarten education as well as general education for boys and girls. However, it is worth noting that girls' education has only been supervised by this Ministry since 2003. Before then, due to the segregation of the sexes, this task was performed by the General Presidency for Girls' Education (GPGE). It should be noted that education for women was frowned upon until the 1970s. As such, it can be said that the creation of this organization with its opportunity for girls' education reflected policy changes that had been agreed upon by King Faisal and some influential leaders within the religious community. The agreement stipulated that the education of girls would be strictly supervised. Education would be conducted by females, but still under the watchful eyes of dependable men (Sabbagh, 1996).

Structure of the General Education System

The duration of the school programme in the KSA totals 12 years: 6 years in primary school, 3 in intermediate, and the final 3 in secondary education. Also, prior to starting their primary education, students have the option of spending 2 years in pre-school and kindergarten. Upon the completion of their primary education, students are admitted to intermediate education. After finishing intermediate education, students can then choose among three paths. They can either pursue vocational training in secondary institutions (industrial, commercial, agriculture, supervisory), or enrol in normal secondary school. Notably, only students choosing the last path can pursue university

education or any other post-secondary degrees. The others are more limited to technical colleges. In addition, students attending normal secondary school can major in either science or arts (literature), provided that their grades meet the entrance requirements. Figure 2 below depicts the education system in the KSA.

Figure 2: Education System of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



Sources: 1) Education System in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Al- Sunbul et al. (1998, p. 91)

2) Education System and Policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Al-Hogail (1998, p.24)

Until recently, the Ministry of Education set the examinations for the final semester of secondary school: ‘the General Certificate of Secondary Education’, so that all students take the same tests. This served as a filtering method to mitigate the great demand on the limited capacity of higher education institutions by giving priority to highest achievers in exams. The importance attached to the general secondary education exams, however, led secondary schools to raise their graduates’ results to give them a better chance to compete for university seats. This, however, has again put more pressure on higher education (Al-Saud, 2009). Therefore, in 2000 the Ministry of Higher Education established an assessment centre, known as ‘The National Centre for Assessment in higher education. Since then the Ministry of Education no longer administers general secondary education exams, and each school now administers its own exams. This new centre develops and administers aptitude and attainment tests to measure students’ abilities, skills, attitudes, and their academic achievements (Al-Saud, 2009). There are two types of aptitude tests: one is tailored for secondary school graduates of scientific majors, and the other for literature majors. They were formulated to “ensure the selection of best applicants for the various disciplines while formulating equity and equal opportunities” (Al-Saud, 2009, p. 727) as a way to overcome the increasing

demand on higher education associated with high inflation in secondary education, and to promote the development of desired capabilities and skills (Al-Saud, 2009). For a student, his or her university major is largely determined by the results of these assessments, combined with secondary school results, as universities use both these tests and high school grades to select student applications.

Higher Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The increasing financial resources at the disposal of the country since the start of oil exploitation in 1938 had a tremendous impact on the development of the educational system. As the Kingdom entered a period of significant economic development, the Government recognised the need for educational institutions that would equip Saudi citizens for the emerging domestic labour market. At that time, the country lacked enough skilled workers to manage the new economy (Bahthelah, 2005). Over the years, the education system enjoyed a steady, though slow development until a wave of rapid development in the 1970s. The advent of an increasingly integrated information and knowledge-driven global economy are other recent factors leading the Government to give this sector highest priority for further development.

At the time of the founding monarch, King Abdul-Aziz, the country had no higher education institutions. The highest educational level a student could achieve was to graduate from the Preparatory Scholarship School, which was established in 1935 under the supervision of the Directorate of Education. This establishment only prepared students for university education in other countries (Al-Hamid et al., 2007). The first Saudi students to pursue higher education were sent in 1926 on scholarship to Al-Azhar University in Egypt. However, the government soon realised the necessity of having its own higher education system and thus began to build and expand it. According to the MOHE (2010) report, the development of the Saudi higher education system went through three stages.

During the foundation stage (1949-1960), the building blocks of the higher education sector were developed. The first college was opened in the Kingdom in 1949. That was the Faculty of Sharia (Jurisprudence) in Makkah (Al-Sunbul et al., 1997). Less than five

years later, two colleges were established in Riyadh - the College of Jurisprudence and the College of Arabic Language. The educational orientation and emphasis on religious subjects and language remained at the core of the curriculum. In 1957, a royal decree ordered the establishment of the Kingdom's first university: the University of Riyadh, later to be renamed the King Saud University, which consisted of four colleges. The four colleges were the Faculty of Literature, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Management Sciences and Faculty of Pharmacy.

During the expansion stage (1961-1980), new higher education institutions were established, including universities, teacher training colleges and women's colleges. Six new universities were established in the major cities of Medina, Jeddah, Makkah, Riyadh, Dhahran, and Al-Hasa (see Table 4 below). Branches of these universities were established in a limited number of cities, like Abha, Qaseem, and Ehsa (MOHE, 2010). Among the existing eight universities, two were Islamic universities with no colleges for science and technology and the third, King Fahad University for Petroleum and Minerals, has no colleges for religion, humanities or social sciences (Bashshur, 2004).

Teacher training colleges and women's colleges are higher education institutions that specialize in producing teachers for general education; the former is for male students, while the latter is for female students who later teach in girls' schools. Degrees in education are offered to students upon the completion of a four-year program, which include the practical teaching requirement. Female enrolment in these colleges has been relatively high, perhaps because teaching was the only profession available to women besides working in the health sector.

The third phase of development was the comprehensive stage (1981-2009). After the establishment of Umm Al-Qura University in Makkah in 1980, no new universities were established until the year 1998, with the establishment of King Khalid University in the southern region. This was not the birth of a new institution, but the result of merging two local branches of two main universities, the south branches of Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University and King Saud University. Between 1998 and 1999, new forms of higher education were permitted--private higher education institutions and community colleges, which will be detailed later in this chapter. However, it was not until 2009 that a royal decree approved the establishment of new public universities. In sheer numbers, it appears that there are twelve new public universities since the last one was established in 1998. In fact, however, there are only five new schools; the other

seven are the result of merging branches of existing universities. This situation underlines the fact that there has been little expansion in the sector for almost two decades, especially at the university level. This suggests issues and challenges facing this sector as will be discussed below.

Table 4: Saudi Higher Education Institutions 1961-2012

Higher Education Body	No. Colleges	Year Established *	
Umm Al-Qura Unvers	24	1980	1961-1980
Al-Imam Mohammed Ibn Saud Islamic University	5	1961	
Kind Saud University	46	1957	
King Abdulaziz University	25	1967	
King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals	9	1975	
King Faisal University	33	1975	
King Khalid University	37	1998	1998-2010
Qassim University	26	2005	
Taibah University	21	2005	
Taif University	18	2006	
King Saud University for Health Sciences	7	2006	
Jazan University	14	2005	
University of Ha'il	10	2005	
Al Jouf University	15	2006	
University of Tabuk	11	2007	
Al Baha University	11	2007	
Najran University	10	2007	
Princess Nora Bint Abdulrahman University	33	2008	
Northern Borders University	12	2008	
Total Public Universities	380		
Technical colleges	35		
Prince Sultan Military College for Health Sciences	1		
Institute of Public Administration	0		
Yunbu and Jubail Colleges	4		
Total	40		
Private Higher Education	38		2000-2010
General Total	458		

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009, p.21)

(*) Based on data from the Ministry of Education (2008, p.7)

In term of governance, all public and private colleges and universities are now under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). Technical colleges, on the other hand, are supervised by the General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training (GOTVOT), which belongs to the Ministry of Labour. The Institute of Public Administration is self-regulating. The Royal Commission of Jubail and Yunbu supervise Al-Jubail and Yunbu Industrial Colleges. Nevertheless, the Council of Higher Education is the supreme governing body for all post-secondary institutions. This council is involved in approving the establishment of new academic units, programmes and institutions. It also has the responsibility of coordinating activities between higher education institutions, appointing rectors of public universities, and approving the bylaws for university operations (MOHE, 2009).

The greatest challenge facing the Kingdom's higher education system--both public and private--is the gap between supply and demand. Projections indicate that by 2030, of approximately 760,000 secondary school graduates, only 250,000 will gain admittance into the higher education system--a gap of 67% (Arab, 2007, p.223-24). This "gap crisis" will be discussed more fully later in the chapter.

But beyond the demographic factors presented in Chapter 3, what socio-economic forces contribute to this demand for university education? The sudden oil boom in the 1970s, with all the social and economic development brought to the country, affected Saudi attitudes towards certain professions and thus towards the type of higher education institutions they may choose to enrol in. University education seems to be important not only for employment, but also for social prestige and most importantly as a key aspect of "marriage-ability"--Saudi Arabia is still characterized by traditional "arranged marriages." Interestingly, though this would be expected among certain social classes, it seems that university education is still highly regarded among all social classes. Enrolment rates for vocational education are still low in comparison to the total enrolment in higher education - at only 9% of the total enrolment in higher education (MOHE, 2010), despite a gradual increase in this path over the years.

Another possible reason why secondary school students prefer higher education is the fact that it is free. All public education in the KSA, including higher education, is provided without cost. Furthermore, all Saudi students of higher education in the KSA

receive monthly stipends equivalent to around \$250. All enrolled students, regardless of their academic performance or social background, are eligible to receive this amount. During the early years of higher education in the KSA, such an incentive was important to encourage Saudi nationals to pursue higher education. This policy is still active, even though now the demand has greatly surpassed the supply. By calculation, we might find that university student stipends constitute a great deal of the higher education budget, an amount that would be more than sufficient to build new universities. Al Khazim (2003) has criticized the Government's spending on stipends, suggesting that the Government should at least link the distribution of stipends to students' academic performance so as to encourage them to work harder, and thus enhance the quality of education. Certain public universities have, only recently, begun to charge tuition fees. A programme called "The Parallel Education Program" (PEP) was created specifically for students who failed to be admitted in the regular programmes. In PEP, courses are offered at night or in the late afternoon. The notion of tuition was also introduced in the Saudi higher education system through the newly emerging private higher education sector.

It may be difficult to comprehend the slow, unbalanced growth in the capacity of the higher education system in a rich country like Saudi Arabia. Many questions are raised regarding the fact that the country's higher education provision depended for almost twenty-five years on eight universities (Alkhazim, 2003). The Government strategy for not expanding is unclear, one may speculate that the economic situation could be the reason. After the great boom in receipts due to high oil prices between 1975-1985, the decline in oil prices in 1996 and consequent shrinkage of government receipts had a major impact on education expenditure. In addition, starting from 1991, the Saudi Governments started to pay for the costs of the Kuwait War. According to Niblock, and Malik (2007), some Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, financed 80% of the Kuwait war. According to Obid (2000), because of this war the Saudi Government incurred huge debt which affected its budget and spending.

Notwithstanding the above, it may be worth noting that, based on the UNDP report of 2003 (UNDP,2003), the budget allocation for general education is higher than that for higher education. In addition, the share of the latter was comparatively decreased from what it was in 1970 in the face of the increase of expenditure on general education from 59% to 82 % of the total education budget. This could be a factor affecting the

expansion of higher education in the country. Bashsher (2004) explains that spending more on general education and less on higher education was a trend across world. According to him, this orientation was based on an economic analysis prevailing in the 1970s and 1980s, which estimated the financial returns to the economy from education. This analysis suggested that primary education yielded a higher return to the economy than higher education. However, this position was later challenged with new evidence on this debate (World Bank, 2000, p.4) which says: “the quality of knowledge generated within higher education institutions, and its availability to the wider economy, is becoming increasingly critical to national competitiveness.” (Bashsher, 2004, p.3)

The Kingdom entered the 21st century, however, with a healthier financial outlook. The Government was released from the burden of the debt generated by the Kuwait War and the price of oil has increased steadily. In fact, financial allocations for human resources development increased during the 8th Five Year Plan (2005–2009) from about SR69.9 billion to about SR104.6 billion, an annual average growth rate of 14.4%, which confirms the commitment of the Kingdom to providing financial support for expanding educational opportunities (Ministry of Planning, 2009). The allocated budget for higher education has increased by more than 200% between the years 2005-2009, from around 3 billion to around 9 billion US dollars (MOHE, 2010). This would account for the current expansion in the Saudi higher education system.

External Scholarships and Community Colleges

Sending students abroad on scholarships is not new to the KSA. As was briefly mentioned, the Government has been sending students abroad since the 1930s when there were no higher education institutions available in the Kingdom. In the past many, if not all, administrators, academics and high-ranking officials have received their qualifications from universities abroad. External scholarships were exclusive to government agencies and public universities. Additionally, some Saudi nationals travelled abroad for education at their own expense.

The number of scholarship beneficiaries has increased over the years. By 1977-78, government scholarships already covered 9,007 students: 8,216 male and 880 female, with Egypt being the major hosting country. Since the mid-1970s, the United States

and Europe have become significant hosting countries (Al-Mousa, 2009). The economic recession between the late 1980s and late 1990s affected the number of students sent abroad by the Governments on scholarships (Al-Essa, 2011). The reduction, however, might be proportional to the demographic boom in the country. Government funding for study abroad was not stopped but considerably reduced. Scholarship levels remained low until the inception of the King Abdullah Scholarship Programme in 2005.

The King Abdullah Scholarship Programme (also called “The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques External Scholarship Program”) was initially launched to cover five years, with different groups of students to be sent during this period. According to Al-Mousa (2009), this programme is considered the largest in the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The State has allocated 7 billion Saudi Riyals for scholarships in prestigious universities in a number of countries (Al-Ohali & Al-Aqili, 2009). It is estimated that more than 80,000 students benefited during the first phase of the programme (2005-2010) and were sent to 55 different countries around the world (MOHE, 2010). Though the year of 2010 was supposed to be the final year of the programme, in that year a royal decree extended it for another five years and this is considered the second phase of this programme. This scholarship programme financially supports Saudi students who study abroad to obtain undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. The mission of the programme has been

“...for scientific, cultural, educational and scholarly exchange with different parts of the world... and to establish highly qualified Saudi cadres for the labour market.” (Al-Mousa, 2009, p. 719).

This scholarship programme focuses on certain disciplines which have been needed in the labour market, including both graduate and post graduate studies (Al-Ohali & Al-Aqili, 2009; Al-Mousa, 2009).

The existence of the vast King Abdullah Scholarship Programme can be attributed to the economic wealth of the Government at the start of the 21st century, a result of high oil prices. In addition, Al-Essa suggests that political considerations also played a major role in the inception of this program:

“The Government was willing to start such a programme as soon as possible to counter the criticism made against the country since 11 Saudis were among the hijackers of 9/11” (Al-Essa, 2011, p. 37).

Thus the Government needed to change its image and needed to consider countries other than the USA where Saudi students can pursue their higher education degrees. Al-Essa (2011) explains that the Saudi education system was accused internally, and by the West, especially the US, of limiting students' awareness of other cultures and in failing to prepare Saudis for the labour market. This resulted in high unemployment and, eventually, involvement by some Saudis in radical organisations.

In the United States, for example, immediately after the 9/11 incident, there was an obvious change in public attitudes towards Saudis. The doors were no longer wide open to Saudi students. The US became less generous in issuing visas to them (The Observatory, 2006). The USA was no longer a welcoming environment in which Saudis could pursue their education. The Saudi Government's change of direction to East Asia - including India, China, Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea - was to rescue its students from humiliation in the USA (The Observatory, 2006). However, the Government also sought to rebuild its relationship with the United States. King Abdullah's visit to the US in April 2005 served to reduce tensions and improve relations. Subsequently, American visas to Saudi students increased, by around 63%, to what they were in 2004/2005. With all the positives of this large-scale scholarship program, there are still opponents to this initiative. In addition to their worries of the brain drain that this programme might cause, they complain that money spent on scholarships should have been invested in building new universities (The Observatory, 2006).

The large number of students' pursuing their higher education abroad underlines the need for expanding the higher education system in the KSA. Study abroad might be a sound temporary solution to lessen the pressure on local higher-education institutions. Nevertheless, it is most likely that this programme will not last very long, and the Saudi higher-education sector will eventually face the need to increase its intake capacity. The establishment of new public universities did not make a significant difference as the majority resulted from merging a number of branches.

Now, completely new types of higher-education institutions have been established. Community colleges and private higher-education institutions are two alternatives to public universities lately introduced to the Kingdom's education system to absorb the

high demand for access to higher education. A brief description of community colleges will be presented, but the main focus will be on private higher education.

“Community college” is a concept that seems to have been borrowed from the American system. Community colleges offer two-year vocational programmes in specialized areas of medical science, applied science, computer-engineering science, and financial science. Upon fulfilling graduation requirements, students are granted associate degrees. Community colleges in Saudi Arabia were first established in 2000 in three cities: Hail, Geazan, and Tabouk. Since then, their numbers have been increasing: there are now around 43 community colleges, each of which is linked to a public university. Upon the completion of their associate degrees, students can enter the job market or transfer to the linked public university and, in two years, can receive a bachelor's degree.

According to data collected from the 2003-2004 academic year, of the 79,000 students enrolled in higher-education institutions at the intermediate diploma level, 7,500 students (i.e., 9.5%) were enrolled in community colleges, 89% of whom were male and 11% of whom were female. The largest number of students enrolled in community colleges is found to be in Riyadh, followed by Tabuk and Baha at the rate of 30.85%, 14.89%, and 14.61%, respectively. Students who attend community colleges receive free tuition but they do not receive the \$250 monthly stipend that students receive in the public universities. Given the lack of capacity in the higher education sector, community colleges may be a means of addressing some of that demand but the lack of a stipend does act as a disincentive for some students.

Supply and Demand Challenges in Higher Education: The contribution of the private sector

Higher education in the KSA faces local challenges as well as the rapid pace of global change. (Al-Ohali, Al-Aqili; 2009). Keeping pace with high population growth, the wide geographic distribution of communities in this huge country, and the increase in the number of secondary school graduates are among the most serious challenges facing Saudi higher education. Indeed, rapid increases in the number of secondary school graduates has led to a steady growth in the demand for higher education. This demand

is even expected to increase more with primary education now being compulsory. This was not the case until the Seventh Development Plan of the country (Ministry Of Planning, 2000). According to the UNDP (2003), gross enrolment of both genders in primary and secondary education increased from 813, 000 in 1975 to around 4 million in 2002. In 2004 and 2008, the total enrolment in general education was 4,355, 658 and 4, 717, 275 respectively with an average annual growth rate of 2.0% (Ministry Of Planning, 2009). For the same period (2004-2008), the output of secondary education increased from 239,379 in 2004 to 321,043 in 2008 with an annual growth rate of 9.2% (MOP, 2009). It was estimated that the number of high school graduates has increased by 400% between 1993 and 2008 (Al-Ohali; 2007).

Table 5 below illustrates the dramatic changes in Saudi higher education enrolment between 1969 and 2005. Clearly there have been massive enrolment increases over time. In 1970-71, there were 8000 male students and no female students! In 1980-81, there were 40,000 male students and 16,000 female students. By 2004-05, there were 219,000 male students and 206,000 female students enrolled. These are impressive gains but they do not tell the whole story which reveals a looming demand gap.

Table 5: Higher Education Enrolment Numbers: 1969-2005

Year	Total No. of Students	No. of Male students	No. of Female Students
1969-70	7000	7000	
1970-71	8000	8000	
1971-72	9000	8000	1000
1972-73	11000	10000	1000
1973-74	15000	13000	2000
1974-75	19000	16000	3000
1975-76	26000	21000	5000
1976-77	32000	25000	7000
1977-78	41000	32000	9000
1978-79	44000	33000	11000
1979-80	48000	35000	15000
1980-81	56000	40000	16000
1981-82	64000	44000	20000
1982-83	75000	51000	24000
1983-84	80000	52000	28000
1984-85	94000	58000	36000
1985-86	104000	63000	41000
1986-87	113000	68000	45000
1987-88	116000	67000	49000
1988-89	117000	66000	51000
1989-90	122000	69000	53000
1990-91	134000	72000	62000
1991-92	142000	74000	68000
1992-93	152000	84000	68000
1993-94	163000	88000	75000
1994-95	170000	87000	83000
1995-96	185000	99000	87000
1996-97	222000	109000	113000
1998-99	272000	134000	138000
1999-2000	321000	147000	174000
2000-2001	343000	162000	181000
2001-2002	348000	150000	198000
2002-2003	380000	192000	218000
2003-2004	394000	205000	189000
2004-2005	525000	219000	206000

Source: Arab, 2007, p. 195

Though there has been growth in enrolment at all levels of education, there have not been equal expansions in the secondary and higher education sectors. As Table 6 below shows, the gap between the number of secondary education graduates and that of higher education/post-secondary admissions has been fairly noticeable since 1985-86 and widened in recent decades.. It is not clear from the study of Al-Medhary (1998) whether the percentage of students accepted takes into account those who did not actually apply for higher education. What is clear from the table is how the gap has been increasing over the years. In 1985-86, 87% of secondary students were accepted into higher education institutions but by 1999-2000 the gap had increased and only 45% were accepted.

Table 6: Public Higher Education Absorption Capacity

Year	Secondary School leavers	Students admitted in higher education	Percentage of Accepted Students
1985/1986	32626	28396	87%
1990/1991	56085	39550	71%
1995/1996	93426	63041	67%
1999/2000	175000	78000	45%

Source: Data 1981/1982 – 1995/1996 are from a study conducted by Al-Medhary 1998
Data 1999/2000: Ministry of Planning (2000), 7th Five Year Plan (2000-2004)

The Government’s Ninth Development Plan (2010-2014) suggests that the Ministry of Higher Education is making some effort to narrow this gap (Ministry of Planning, 2009). According to this plan, the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions increased by 7.4% from 2004-2008, and the number of students accepted into higher education institutions increased by 6.8%.

With all the efforts by the Government to reduce this gap between supply and demand in higher education, the high birth rate, as previously described, is yet another significant challenge to the closing of this gap. A study done by Aasim Arab (2007) estimates the gap between general and higher education enrolment for the next 25 years (See Table 7 below). In his study, the numbers of students graduating from secondary education and those to be accepted at the university level were calculated by assuming that the present rate of growth will continue without any change in general and higher education. The

estimate indicated a tendency for the gap to increase from 62.5% in 2009/2010 to 67.2% in 2030/31. The study also estimates that the gap will be wider for females than males.

Arab estimates that by the end of 2030-31, the number of female secondary school graduates will have increased by 326% (from 2005) to reach 416,000, a growth rate of 4.8% per year (Arab, 2007, p.396). For the same period, male secondary school graduates will increase by 324% to about 370,000 graduates, also at a growth rate of 4.8% (Arab, 2007p.395). Even the Government's own recent Eighth Development Plan (2000-2004) estimated that the demand gap would be 69% by the end of 2004-2005. Thus, it is likely that by 2030 nearly half a million secondary school graduates will not find places in the existing higher education system. This presents a daunting challenge not only for education but in terms of meeting the needs of a modern globalized economy.

Table 7: Supply-Demand: Expected Gap

Number of students not expected to be Absorbed in Higher Education in Five-Year Periods				
Year	Expected Graduates of Secondary School	Expected to join HE	Not Join HE	Expected to % of those not absorbed by HE
2009/2010	306178	114737	191441	62.5
2015/16	400246	143558	256688	64.1
2020/21	507105	175576	331529	65.4
2025/26	626755	210790	415965	66.4
2030/31	759195	249200	509995	67.2

Source: Arab (2007, p.230)

As has been seen, the total enrolment share of the Saudi private sector is only 3.49%. This can hardly address the huge future demand indicated above. Aasim Arab has conducted a detailed survey of Saudi private higher education. In his unpublished study he concludes:

“...that under the failure of government higher education to absorb the growing number of secondary stage graduates and the failure of private higher education to increase its share in absorption of these graduates, short and medium solutions will not help in making private higher education institutions capable of absorbing greater numbers of these graduates” (Arab, 2007, p. 414).

There are a number of points worth emphasizing here. First, the private education sector of the KSA is in its infancy. The first institutions only opened 12 years ago. Their wider acceptance among Saudi students (and their parents) will take time - many Saudi people are not even aware of the existence of this sector. Government recognition has been halting and financial support has been limited (though increasing), as will be seen in detail in Chapter 10. Some of the new private higher education institutions are growing rapidly--far beyond expectation. The College of Business Administration in Jeddah, for example, began with 200 students in 2000, and now has

nearly 4000 students. Its Board projects an enrolment of up to 10,000 within a decade. As the public develops greater awareness of the value of these new institutions, demand will increase. Second, if these institutions do, in fact, produce a higher quality of education, with students better prepared for the world of work, that too will increase demand. In this regard, my study intends to document the perceptions of those currently involved in and with Saudi private higher education--students, administration, government and the labour market. It is also hoped that the findings of this thesis may reveal the strengths and weaknesses of private higher education institutions and what can be done to increase the competitiveness of this sector in the future.

Arab makes the case that Saudi private education will be necessary to meet some part of the demand gap. He recommends a long-term, large-scale plan that would increase

“...the number of private colleges by about 244 colleges to be established during the strategy period (2005-2030), based on admission absorption capacity of 1000 students per year, or about 122 colleges based on admission of 2000 students per year” (Arab, 2007, p. 415).

These are ambitious goals, but one may agree that the demand curve will inevitably lead to significant changes in both the public and private higher education sectors. It is hoped that higher education in the private sector may be able to expand at a much greater rate than the public sector has over the last thirty years. As presented in Table 8 below, the number of private universities has been steadily increasing - from 4 private colleges in 2000 to 18 private colleges and 9 private universities in 2010.

Table 8: Saudi Private Higher Education Institutions 2000-2012

	Private Higher Education Instituion	Location	Teaching started	Gender
1	King Abdullah University for Science and Technology	Jeddah	2009/2010	Mixed education
2	Prince Sultan University	Riyadh	2000/2001	Male/Female
3	Arab Open University	Riyadh, Jeddah,	2003/2004	Male/Female
4	Prince Mohamed bin Fahd University	Al Khobar	2007/2008	Male/Female
5	Alfaisal University	Riyadh	2008/2009	Male/Female
6	Al Yamamah University	Riyadh	2004/2005	Male/Female
7	Effat University	Jeddah	2000/2001	Female
8	Dar Al Uloom University	Riyadh	2009/2010	Male/Female
9	Fahad Bin Sultan University	Tabuk	2006/2007	Male/ Female
10	Dar Al- Hekma College	Jeddah	2000/2001	Female
11	Prince Sultan College for Tourism and Business	Abha	2000/2001	Male
12	Albaha Private College of Science	Al Baha	2000/2001	Male/Female
13	College of Business Administration	Jeddah	2004/2005	Male/Female
14	Soliman Fakeeh College for Science and Nursing	Jeddah	2004/2005	Male/Female
15	Riyadh College of Dentistry	Riyadh	2004/2005	Male/Female
16	Ibn Sina National College for Medical studies	Jeddah	2005/2006	Male/Female
17	Qassim Private College	Qassim	2006/2007	Male/Female
18	Prince Sultan College for Tourism and Management	Jeddah	2007/2008	Male/Female
19	Batterjee Medical College	Jeddah	2007/2008	Male/Female
20	Saad College of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences	Al-khobar	2007/2008	Male/Female
21	Arriyadah college of Medical Sciences	Jeddah	2007/2008	Male/Female
22	Almarefah College for Science and Technology	Riyadh	2009/2010	Male/Female
23	Buraydah college for Applied medical Sciences	Buraydah	2009/2010	Male/Female
24	Mohammed Al Mani College for Medical Sciences	Al Khobar	2009/2010	Male/Female
25	Global colleges	Riyadh	2009/2010	Male/Female
26	Al-Farabi Dentistry College	Riyadh	2009/2010	Male/Female
27	Al-Faisal Graduate College	Riyadh	2010/2011	Male/Female
28	Al-Ghad International Medical Science colleges	Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam, Abha, Qassim, Tabuk, Najran\Al-Madinah, Hafr Al-Batin	2009/2010	Male/Female
29	Sulaiman Al Rajhi Colleges	Al Bukayriyah	2009/2010	Male/Female

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2012a)

In terms of geographic locations, the distribution of Saudi private universities is noticeably uneven - they are more likely to be found in major cities of the country (MOHE, 2009, p.83). In particular, private universities and colleges are highly concentrated in the country's two largest cities--Riyadh and Jeddah, as Table 8 illustrates. Ten are located in the city of Jeddah and nine in the city of Riyadh. A few others are located in cities such as Alkhobar, Tabouk, Abha, Qassim, Najran, Medina and Hafr Albaten, Buraydah, and Albekariyah. This is hardly surprising as it echoes a global trend noticed by many (for instance Levy, 2008, 2009) that there exists a strong connection between a region's economic situation and its higher education provision capacity.

With regard to gender, all private universities serve both genders but on separate campuses with three exceptions. Two private institutions in the city of Jeddah--namely, Effat University and Dar Al-Hekma University--accept women only. King Abdullah University of Science and Technology accepts both men and women students who attend classes together on one campus.

Enrolment in the Saudi Private Sector

In absolute numbers, the number of institutions in the private sector appears to be higher than that of the public sector, 27 for the former and 21 for the latter. However, such numbers do not reveal the number of colleges within each university. To overcome the complexity that such a calculation might entail, the private sector's share of enrolment should be sufficient to compare the private and public sectors.

Table 9: Students' Enrolment in Higher Education System

Higher-Education Body	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Um Alqura University	24,386	28,815	53,201	7.02%
The Islamic University	8,422	0	8,422	1.11%
Imam Mohammed Bis Saud Islamic University	22,908	14,613	37,521	4.95%
Kind Saud University	46,088	30,144	76,232	10.06
King Abdul Aziz University	43,645	42,462	86,107	11.36%
King Fahad for Petroleum and Minerals University	9,451	0	9,541	1.26%
King Faisal University	11,899	46,489	58,388	7.71%
King Khalid University	14,342	40,109	54,451	7.19%
Qassim University	17,149	23,648	40,797	5.38%
Taibah University	11,840	32,562	44,402	5.86%
Taif University	29,111	19,183	29,111	3.84%
King Saud University for Health Sciences	601	849	1,450	0.19%
Ijazan University	7,841	18,806	26,647	3.52%
Hail University	5,308	12,169	17,477	2.31%
Aljouf University	6,406	9,213	15,619	2.06%
Tabouk University	3,774	10,391	14,165	1.87%
Albaha University	4,876	9,375	14,251	1.88%
Najran University	1,342	7,453	8,795	1.16%
Princess Noura Bent Abdulrahman University	0	44,708	44,708	5.90%
Northern Borders University	2,442	5,037	7,479	0.99%
Technical colleges	67,124	3,218	70,342	9.28%
Prince Sultan Military College for Health Sciences	188	156	344	0.05%
Institute of Public Administration	7,224	1,740	8,964	1.18%
Aljubail and Yunbu Industrial Colleges	2,616	324	2,940	0.39%
Private Higher Education	130,447	12,969	26,416	3.49%
Total	343,337	414,433	757,770	100%

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009, p. 82)

At the moment, private higher education accounts for a small share of the student number of the current system. As Table 9 above demonstrates, private education accounts for only 3.49% of total enrolment. Enrolment in private higher education are even lower than that in technical colleges, which constitute 9.28% of total enrolment and even slightly less than that of community colleges which constitute 3.94% of enrolment (MOHE, 2009). Interestingly, while the number of female students exceeds male students in the public sector, the situation is reversed in the private sector. In the private sector, male enrolment surpasses female enrolment by 2%--51% male students and 49% female students. In the public sector there are 45.3% male students and 54.7% female students.

Moreover, the private sector's enrolment share in the KSA is very low compared to other countries in East Asia or Eastern Europe where the average enrolment rate for private higher education is 70% for the former and around 30% for the latter. However, only limited data on private sector enrolment in the GCC and other Arab countries are available to compare with that of the KSA. According to a UNESCO report (2009) on higher education institutions in the Arab world, compared to other GCC countries Saudi Arabia are behind the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain in the number of its private sector universities: the UAE has 55 private universities, Bahrain has 13, and KSA has 9. However, this report did not count existing private colleges, which would reflect a different view about the size of the private sector if included.

The relatively small size of the Saudi private education sector (see Table 10 below), especially when compared to that of the UAE, can be attributed to the UAE's open policy toward foreign providers of higher education, as has been discussed in the previous section. Saudi Arabia has not yet permitted foreign providers to fully operate within the Kingdom's higher education system. This reflects caution on the part of the government. Though the UAE has strict policies about higher education institution ownership, which have to be owned by nationals, they overcame such policy restrictions by establishing a Free Zone area, which attracted international providers.

Table 10 : Enrolment in Private Higher Education Institutions

Private Higher Education Institutions	Male	Female	Total	%
1-King Abdullah University for Science and Technology	*	*	*	*
2-Prince Sultan University	908	1299	2207	8.3
3- Arab Open University	7418	6155	13573	51.38
4-Prince Mohamed bin Fahd University	654	602	1256	4.75
5-Alfaisal University	88	0	88	0.33
6-Al Yamamah University	567	516	1083	4.1
7-Effat University	0	452	452	1.7
8-Dar Al Uloom University	*	*	*	*
9- Fahad Bin Sultan University	301	178	479	1.81
8-Dar Al- Hekma College	0	814	814	3.08
9-Prince Sultan College for Tourism and Business (Abha)	361	0	361	1.37
10-Albaha Private College of Science	269	0	269	1.02
11-College of Business Administration	1038	504	1542	5.84
12-Soliman Fakeeh College for Science and Nursing	151	134	258	1.08
13-Riyadh College of Dentistry	541	704	1245	4.71
14-Ibn Sina National College for Medical studies	596	576	1127	4.4
15-Qassim Private College	241	78	319	1.21
16-Prince Sultan College for Tourism and Management (Jeddah)	55	0	55	6.21%
18-Batterjee Medical College	142	145	287	1.09
19-Saad College of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences	0	211	211	0.80
20-Arriyadah college of Medical Sciences	0	132	132	0.50
21-Almarefah College for Science and Technology	*	*	*	*
22-Buraydah college for Applied medical Sciences	0	41	41	0.165
23-Mohammed Al Mani College for Medical Sciences	*	*	*	*
24-Global colleges	*	*	*	*
25-Al-Farabi Dentistry College	*	*	*	*
26-Al-Faisal Graduate College	*	*	*	*
27-Al-Ghad International Medical Science colleges	*	*	*	*
28-Sulaiman Al Rajhi Colleges	*	*	*	*
29-Inaya College	*	*	*	*

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009, p.84)

(*) New institutions, no data were available

Another possible contributing factor to the relatively low enrolment in the Saudi private education sector, despite high demand, is the large number of students sent abroad on scholarships awarded by the government. These King Abdullah scholarships--described previously in the chapter--benefited over 80,000 students between 2005 and 2010 (MOHE, 2010). Table 11 below documents that the number of Saudis studying abroad on scholarships (6913) is only slightly more than those studying abroad at their own expense (6745).

Table 11: Enrolled students Studying Abroad 2009

Country	Scholarships		Self-Support		Total		Rates (%)
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Arab Countries	8468	2878	2038	595	10506	3473	23.81
East Asia	6923	1348	1636	195	8559	1543	17.21
European	9764	3446	1807	289	11571	3735	26.07
USA and Canada	13066	3066	2842	349	15908	3415	32.91
Total	38221	10738	8323	1428	46544	12166	100

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009, p.148)

Conclusion

In this chapter, I carried out a survey of the general education system and also the development of higher education in the KSA. The Saudi education system presents its own series of challenges to the Kingdom. Education began over a century ago in small, local religious schools. The first public system was established under Ottoman rule with instructions in Turkish. By the 1950s, there was still no organised curriculum. It was difficult to recruit qualified teachers. Conservative religious forces blocked the use of foreign educational resources. As a result, there was a delay by the Government in curriculum development and the updating of older textbooks. The first public university did not open until 1957. By 1980, there were six new public universities, but no other new ones were established until 2009.

With steady population growth, the higher education system has barely expanded over 30 years. This has created the greatest challenge of all for higher education—a lack of

capacity. In 2009–10, 62% of students attempting to enrol in higher education failed to obtain admission. It is estimated that by 2030 this gap will increase to such an extent that 67% of students who apply will not be admitted. Another significant factor driving this heightened demand was the growth in oil revenues over the last 40 years. This has led to changing social attitudes: young Saudis saw education as vital to well-paid employment, social prestige, and marriage. Demand was also stimulated by public higher education being tuition-charge free and with the Government paying a stipend of \$250 per month. This education was open to all, regardless of academic performance. Clearly, capacity is an important issue in the Saudi higher education system. Therefore, private higher education is necessary in Saudi Arabia, and there is no question that private higher education is to some extent providing wider access to higher education. However, the share of the private sector in the total enrolment is very low. This is because the sector is still in its early stages of development. Its public recognition has yet to be increased. Another possible reason is the financial burden which it imposes upon students. Public higher education remains free for all but students in the private sector have only limited access to scholarships. Therefore, at this moment the first assumption regarding the capacity does not apply to the Saudi context. I shall approach a discussion of this point in a later chapter with reference to my empirical data. But now I shall move on to the methodology of empirical work.

Chapter 5

Research methodology

Introduction

The discussion in this chapter mainly applies to the empirical part of this research. Data collected from my fieldwork is used in Parts III and IV of this study. In the following sections, I elaborate the rationale for the empirical part of this research. I also explain how the study was conducted, as well as how and why the participants and survey site were chosen. Data collection methods—the interview process—are presented in detail, as are the data analysis procedures. Research issues such as validity, reliability, and ethical considerations are discussed, again with reference to the literature in the field.

The purpose of my fieldwork has been to explore private higher education in Saudi Arabia. It intended to examine the emergence of the private sector of higher education through the perceptions of stakeholders. Therefore, the principal research method used within the study has been that of interviews with stakeholders. The themes and topics covered in Parts III and IV are derived from the views and opinions of my interviewees. I believe an empirical study like this will help us understand the nature of the private higher education sector and will contribute in answering my research questions.

Research Paradigm

The design of this study depended on the paradigm adopted. Lawson and Garrod (2003) define “research paradigm” as being a set of ideas and beliefs which define existing knowledge and the nature of the problems to be investigated, orient the appropriate methods of investigation and the way in which the findings should be analysed and interpreted. According to their basic epistemological and ontological assumptions, paradigms are grouped into “quantitative” (e.g., positivism, post positivism) and “qualitative” (e.g., constructivism, interpretive, ethnographic

methodology, symbolic constructivism) (Cohen et al., 2011). While the former approaches state that reality is objectively measurable through a collection of quantitative data drawn from the observable world which is being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), the latter establishes that 'multiple realities' do not exist objectively but are actively constructed by people. This individual and unique nature of realities needs to be examined through the eyes of participants rather than researchers (Cohen et al., 2011).

The study approaches its investigation of Saudi private higher education from an interpretive paradigm. This researcher would argue that the interpretive paradigm is better suited to this purpose rather than "positivist" and post positivists" paradigms as the last two paradigms state that the social world is not any different from the natural world. This led those schools of thought to believe that both worlds can be studied in the same way (Merttens, 2010). The latter two paradigms are inconsistent with the purpose of this thesis because they imply that social science should be understood in relation to laws parallel to natural science, laws from which generalizations can be made (Denzin & Lincoln; 2005). Contrarily, a qualitative/interpretive approach contradicts the assumption that human behaviour can be governed by universal laws (Pring, 2000).

An interpretive paradigm tends to suppose a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent concrete understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures" (Denzin & Lincoln; 2000, p.21). This research is primarily concerned with the understanding of individuals rather than testing or verifying general law. From this philosophical point of view, the role of the researcher is "to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning" (Robson; 2002, p. 27) of people and how together--the subjects of study and the researcher--construct "the reality." Lincoln and Guba (1985) find interpretive inquiries to be better served by qualitative research because of their sensitivity, flexibility and adaptability.

"Qualitative research" is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.17) as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of stratification". Creswell (2003) finds the qualitative approach to be more appropriate when the study is exploratory. That is the case in this research in which I explore the emergence of private higher education in Saudi Arabia through the

perceptions of its stakeholders. Creswell further explains that qualitative research provides the researcher access to what he calls “participants’ meanings” that the quantitative approach lacks. Johnson also suggests that qualitative research is used to “engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features.” (1997; p.4) This is not to say that the quantitative approach cannot be used for this kind of research, but not at this exploratory stage. The quantitative approach fails to serve the interpretive paradigm. Such a paradigm depends on the participants’ meanings to develop an understanding about the matter of interest. If a quantitative approach had been used, I would not have obtained the same rich data the qualitative approach provides. A quantitative survey requires the researcher to have considerable knowledge of the subject matter so as to be able to develop variables that can be examined through quantitative methods like surveys. Themes and concepts that emerge from this qualitative study could be later examined quantitatively; they could form variables for later investigation. The different views expressed and issues raised by stakeholders in interviews could be analysed later by quantitative methods. The qualitative research approach used for this study is concerned more with depth of information about the sector rather than breadth. As Silverman (2005) suggests “qualitative researchers are prepared to sacrifice scope for ‘detail’” (p. 9) and he explains that these details are reached through peoples’ understanding.

Locating the Study/Selecting the Participants

The research sample was selected entirely from the city of Jeddah. Jeddah is a city that has its own significance because of its strategic location. Jeddah has always been the first to establish private educational institutions in the Kingdom. The first private primary school established in the country was in the city of Jeddah, as was the first private higher education institution--the King Abdul Aziz University--later to become a public institution. Again, when the door was opened for the second time for private higher education, the first private institution established was in the city of Jeddah.

Cost, time, and convenience were other factors considered when planning for the sample of the study (Cohen et al., 2000). Coming from the city of Jeddah and considering the three factors suggested above motivated me as the researcher to select

the participants from this urban area. In addition, Jeddah, together with the city of Riyadh, has the highest number of private higher education institutions. I also thought that sampling in one region would not have a major effect on the results as the conditions and context of higher education is similar among the different parts of the country. All higher education institutions operate under the same rules and regulations and there are not many differences between them-- the exception being King Fahad University for Petroleum and Minerals in the Eastern region. However, the case that the participants interviewed here come only from higher institutions of the city of Jeddah might suggest that the background and the particular characteristics of this city affects stakeholders' experiences regarding private higher education. For example, one particular cultural difference between Jeddah and other parts of the country is that Jeddah is a less culturally conservative city. Its citizens--particularly its women--are more open in their attitudes compared to those in other Saudi cities. While believing that Jeddah generally presents a representative sample for the Kingdom, I tried to remain sensitive to any elements in the interviews which might reflect the unique qualities of that city.

Participants in this study were selected from three private higher education institutions and from the single public university in the city, as well as employers from the labour market and from the Ministry of Higher Education. Each of the private institutions did not represent two separate case studies as the aim was not to compare them. However, participants' responses suggested different views between public and private higher education institutions. The reason that the sample was obtained from those three private higher education institutions is that they are the first private institutions established in the city of Jeddah and thus have a history and also a number of graduates. Another reason is that, to some extent, I wanted to unify my sample. Thus, I limited my sample to business subjects as the business major is common to all three private higher education institutions. Based on this decision, my sample from the public sector was taken only from the College of Business Administration. However, I intentionally interviewed a few students from various other majors to see if they had different perceptions.

Sampling Techniques

Purposive snowball sampling techniques were used for this study. In purposive sampling, participants are selected to allow the researcher to develop understanding in the area of investigation. The selection of participants in this fashion is based on their relevance to the aim of the research (Mason, 2002). As the aim of this research is to explore and develop an understanding about private higher education in the KSA through the view of its stakeholders, I wanted my sample to include stakeholders from both sectors (public and private), to involve both genders, to only include undergraduate students and exclude graduate students.

Snowball sampling technique is a non-probability sampling method in which “the researcher identifies one or more individuals from the populations of interest.” After they have been interviewed, they are used as informants to identify other members of the population (Robson, 2002, p. 265-266). In other words, participants in the study are recruited according to referrals made by those who were interviewed before them (Cohen et al., 2000). The pool of participants keeps increasing through this same technique (Vogt, 1999). Adriaans (1992) asserts that if the objectives of a study are mainly exploratory, qualitative and descriptive, this technique of sampling can be used. While this technique lowers the requirements of research resources, it can however reduce the likelihood that the sample represents a good cross section of the population. That said, however, I requested lists of names of students and employers from private institutions as a starting point. Then the snowballing technique was later applied. My previous work in a private college allowed me to network with people from other private higher education institutions in the city of Jeddah. Networking was very helpful in recruiting people, especially for my pilot study as almost all stakeholders interviewed were providers of private higher education and those working in administrative positions.

Participants in the Study

The sample in the study was comprised of the following stakeholders:

1. policymakers from the Ministry of Higher Education,
2. members of the Boards of Trustees of private higher education institutions,
3. faculty and staff from public and private higher education institutions, and
4. students and graduates from the three different private universities and the one public university.

It was believed that each type of stakeholder could provide relevant information to this study through their own perspectives about private higher education. Their views and experiences could help to construct a better view of private higher education in the city of Jeddah and, to some extent, the country as a whole. I also chose to involve students and graduates of both genders. However, the sample resulted in a smaller male representation than female due to cultural constraints that restrict male and female interactions, especially in public places. Hence, only a few face-to-face interviews with male participants were carried out through previous arrangement. Most of the interviews with men were conducted via telephone. Another reason is that the number of male students is less than the number of female students among the three private institutions selected, only one of which has a male campus. Table 12 below shows the number of participants under each stakeholder category. I had interviewed people from the same private institution while doing the pilot study.

Table 12: Participants by Stakeholder Category

Participants	Faculty and Administrators	Students	Graduates	Employers	Government Officials
Private	7M/21 F	4M/20F	4M/9F	10M/2F	3M
Public	4M/5F	2M/4F	2M/10F		

Pilot Study

My field research consisted of two phases: a pilot study and the main study. They both contribute to the findings of this research. The value of conducting a pilot study before the main study is examined in various literature. Baker (1994), for example, explains how important a pilot study is in examining the appropriateness of a particular instrument of investigation. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) also suggest a number of advantages in conducting a pilot study before the full study. One of the benefits is that it gives the researcher an early warning about possible areas in which the research could fail, or whether suggested research methods are unsuitable and it enables the researcher to deduce whether there are any politics that might influence the continuity of the research.

All the highlighted advantages of conducting a pilot study seemed especially appropriate to this research. I did not have any previous experience in conducting this type of research. It was good training for me before conducting the actual study, and the fact that it was only a pilot study made for more relaxed, and less tense interviews. Through the pilot study I became aware that interviews were not simple tasks and were a challenging method for data collection. I realised the necessity of improving my interviewing skills. Nevertheless, as I listened to the pilot study interviews I sensed that my skills progressively improved.

The scarcity of studies available on private higher education in the KSA required me to do a pilot study for my research to explore the field and to develop a better focus. The pilot study did have an influence on the kind of participants involved in the main study. For the pilot, my sample covered only one type of private higher education stakeholder: faculty and staff. However, I thought, as this study is an exploratory one, I would benefit from a wider perspective of private higher education and to include other stakeholders in my study (policymakers, students, employers). This change required adding questions that address the relation between the labour market and private higher education.

Methods of Data Collection

Consistent with the interpretive approach employed in this study, interviews were an appropriate technique to allow participants to express their views, perceptions and experiences. Kvale (2009) finds interviews to be

“particularly suited for studying people’s understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self- understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspectives on their lived world” (p.105)

Interviews provide more depth and detailed information than other qualitative methods (Robson, 2002). Using interviews for this study allowed participants to present their views on private higher education in the KSA in their own words.

The interviews were semi-structured to allow me to dig deeper into participants’ views which is an advantage that structured interviews do not have. Indeed, in structured interviews the researcher has to stick to the order of the questions, the wording, even on his or her expressions thus limiting the exploration of the phenomenon of study (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, Robson (2002) suggests that, the less structured the interview, the more flexibility the interviewee has in his or her responses. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has the flexibility to change the order and the wording of the interview questions (Merriam, 1998). Unstructured interviews were avoided so I could have more control over the data while performing my analysis, especially since I have limited experience in handling data. In unstructured interviews, the researcher has no prepared schedule for the interview but only notes on major areas to be covered (Robson, 2002). This could take the researcher into many directions if the researcher is not expert enough.

In addition to interviews, data were also gathered from documents. These included ministerial and governmental reports and websites. Reasons for reviewing documents are twofold. First, it is a way to verify data collected from the interviews (data triangulation) (Robson, 2002). Secondly, as Yin (2003) suggests, documents complement gaps in the interviews. This certainly applied to the Ministry’s case as not much data were gathered through the interview process. Table 13 below summarizes my methods and the areas they targeted in relation to the research aims.

Table 13: Summary of Research Methods/Purpose

Summary of methods	Purpose
Interviews	Dig deeper into stakeholders' perception, eliciting their opinions, points of views, experiences on private higher education
Government Documents (Five year Development Plan of theinterviewees. As an additional source of information Ministry of Planning, higher educationcomplementing the point of view of Government website).	Necessary as I had limited access to Government policymakers.
Field notes	Keep a record of conversations, non-taped interviews, observations and reflections.

The Interview Process

From the pilot study, I came to realise that providing interviewees with informed-consent forms immediately elicited respect from the participants with regard to the research and the interview. However, this did not mean that they were concerned that I was complying with research protocols or that they were aware of it. Participants took the process of the interview seriously and got greatly involved although they did not carefully examine the consent form. For instance, they tended not to have the patience to read the consent form. They would simply say: “Just tell me. What does this form say?” Then they would sign it. This attitude was observed not only with students, but also with faculty members and staff who were interviewed. As this attitude was prevalent, I decided to first go over the consent form in detail with participants to make sure they were informed about the conditions and then asked them to sign it to ensure protection for the participants and for myself as the researcher. All consent forms were carefully filed.

In addition to the individual consent forms, I had to submit institutional consent forms to the institutions to obtain their permission to access their premises for interviewing students, faculty, and staff. Then I had to obtain the informed-consent forms from each participant. No institutional consent forms were used while doing the pilot study as I felt that, as long as I was interviewing only senior officials in the college administration, those who were in charge, then I should not worry about having official approval. Thus, they were provided with only the individual consent forms. As the main study involved other stakeholders, I had then to submit institutional consent forms in addition to the individual consent forms to obtain the institutions’ permission to access their premises to interview those other stakeholders.

Though my interviews during the pilot study were with the senior administrative staff in those institutions, it did not guarantee easy access for my main field work. I had to contact certain offices in these institutions to obtain institutional approval. Offices were contacted via email to which I had attached the institutional consent form, explaining the nature of my research and the ethical considerations to be taken by me as a researcher. I made several phone calls to these offices to follow up on my request--to no avail. After three weeks, I went to these institutions to talk in person. The source of the delay occurred in two private higher education institutions, not the one I used to work

in. The private university where I previously worked was more helpful, and we proceeded faster.

Apparently, the private institutions contacted did not understand the nature of my research. It seems that personnel from these institutions thought that I was evaluating their institutions. I had to reassure them that I was investigating Saudi private higher education as a whole and was not assessing or criticising individual institutions. They tried to compile a list of students and faculty I could interview. I appreciated their efforts, and it was a good starting point, but I did not follow their lists as it would have biased my sample.

Interviews were conducted in different ways, depending on the interviewees and their availability. A friendly and informal conversational style was used with students and graduates. While interviewing other stakeholders (faculty, staff, and employers), I had to employ a more formal mode. Arranging interview appointments was not an easy task with all levels of stakeholders. Students were busy with their studies, while graduates, employers, faculty and staff were busy with their own work. However, I managed to conduct all the interviews in an appropriate time for the participants.

All interviews were conducted face to face, except seven which were telephone interviews, and one which was a written interview. Telephone interviews involved some male participants (students and graduates) as there was difficulty involved in meeting with them alone in public. Gender separation in Saudi society is mandatory. This tool was a good alternative especially with male students from the public sector. With regard to the consent form, the context was explained in full to the participants. All telephone participants found such explanations to be sufficient and none asked for the material to be emailed to them for examination. Face-to-face meetings with male participants took place either in the private higher education institutions to which I had access or at the employers' offices. This contrasted with public institutions in which I was denied access because of religious reasons. Although there are ways for women to get access to these places, the procedure is extremely complicated, which makes this option almost impossible.

In addition to the social constraints I faced when interviewing male participants, there was a political obstacle. I was not allowed to do telephone interviews with employees of

the Ministry of Higher Education. After waiting for a long time to conduct a telephone interview with a representative of the Ministry, on the agreed day he unexpectedly refused to be interviewed. He explained that such information is sensitive and that it would represent the views of the Ministry. He requested written questions. I wondered what kind of discussion this participant expected, if the research topic and consent form were to be sent in advance to his secretary at the Ministry. A written form of the interview questions was sent via email. I then had to wait many months, asking repeatedly for a response before this person from the Ministry responded electronically to the interview questions. I was pleased at least to receive any response from the Ministry. Nevertheless, there were points that needed further elaboration, but no reply was received. Thus, I was forced to resort to Ministry documents, publications, and websites to analyse the Government's view on the matter.

Interview Schedules and Procedures

Four different interview schedules were used for this study, one for each category of stakeholder: students and graduates, faculty and staff of higher education institutions, employers and the Government sector represented by the Ministry of Higher Education and other government officials (see Appendix 3 for interview schedules). In particular, students and graduates were asked the same questions, with the exception that graduates were asked about their current jobs and the time they had waited before getting their first job. The interview schedules provided a framework for eliciting the data needed to examine each stakeholder's perceptions of private higher education.

Before starting any interview, I introduced myself and explained the purpose of my research. During the interview I was concerned with providing a relaxed environment for my participants. The duration of each interview was, on average, one hour. All interviews were tape-recorded, and handwritten notes were also taken. For each interview, a copy of the interview schedule was printed with a space under each theme to be covered for note taking or to pencil in further elaborations needed from the interviewee. These points and comments were very helpful for later interviews. Notes regarding the sequence of the questions or about which questions should be asked were also written after the interviews.

Considering the exploratory nature of my study, interview questions were broad in nature so as not to direct my interviews toward any particular view. As the interview schedules were semi-structured, the sequence of the questions varied among interviewees but all were within the same frame.

All interviews were mainly conducted in Arabic, and occasionally in English. Only two interviews--with foreign instructors--were conducted completely in English. I had learnt an important lesson from my pilot study--when participants are interviewed in English, they become less elaborative and tend to provide short answers. While conducting the pilot study, all participants were given the freedom to reply to my questions in either language, Arabic or English. Few insisted on using English; but, unfortunately, for those who did, it resulted in poorer quality interviews compared to those conducted in Arabic. Nevertheless, it was necessary for my main study to conduct interviews in English with the foreign instructors interviewed as they do not speak Arabic. An unusual thing occurred while interviewing students from private higher education institutions. I intended to ask questions in Arabic, but the majority of students were answering in English. If the whole reply was not in English, most of the words were, even from those who were not fluent in English. A possible explanation of this behaviour is that in a country like Saudi Arabia, there is this connection between the use of English and the sense of social class. People tend to use English as a sign of social privilege or prestige as will be more fully discussed in Chapter 9.

The flow and smoothness of the interviews were a major concern for me. There were many times when participants' answers were related to other questions that I was going to ask later. In that case I had only to prompt and ask for elaboration of the point. I also made use of "probing." The literature suggests planning for probing beforehand (Robson, 2002). In a few cases, listening to my previous interviews suggested that I probe for a particular question next time. Robson (2002) explains the benefit of probing:

"Probes help you manage the conversation by regulating the length of answers and degree of details, clarifying unclear sentences or phrases, filling in the missing steps and keeping the conversation on topic." (p.164).

I realised the value of semi-structured interviews for probing, something that structured questionnaires lack, as Robson (2002) has noted. I felt freed from being a slave to an interview schedule. Randor remarks:

“A good qualitative interviewer reads the situation in which she is interviewing and may feel it is better to begin at a different place in the schedule and or phrase the questions in different sort of way” (1994, p. 17).

As an interviewer, I consider myself to be an active listener. Following Randor’s suggestions, I tried to continually show interest in what the interviewee was saying, verbally and non-verbally. I try always to nod my head, widen my eyes to encourage the interviewee to go on with his/her response. I used a common Arabic word “Mashallah,” which signifies admiration for what the person is saying or wearing. I believe all my interviews had a pleasant atmosphere, and I did not encounter problems with my interviewees when I asked for elaboration or clarification.

Data Analysis

Knight (2002) has described the process of data analysis: “It begins with the research design and data captured, and it continues as repeated thinking about meanings that might be identified in the data” (p.175) Scholars have different views on the stage at which the analysis of the data starts. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Maxwell (1996), for example, suggest that interviewing and analysing data are to be integrated so each informs the other. Seidman (2006), on the other hand, suggests avoiding in-depth analysis until all interviews are conducted to avoid imposition of views from one participant to another. As a researcher, I think I hold a position between these two views. I was not doing full transcription and analysis of my data while I was in the field for my interviews. At the beginning, I used to listen to the interviews and put down ideas that I felt were relevant to my research questions. I thought that doing so was a good substitute for transcribing the whole interview. Comments might make sense when I first wrote them, but by the time I finished all my interviews, not all of them were making sense. I agree with Seidman’s observation on this technique: “Although this approach is labour-saving, it is not desirable because it imposes the researcher’s frame of reference on the interview data one step too early in the process...Preselecting parts of the tapes to transcribe and omitting others tends to lead to premature judgment about what is important and what is not.” (Seidman, 2006, p. 115). Although transcription necessarily involves some level of analysis, the results of this analysis were not allowed to influence future interviews.

The analysis of the data collected through the study was conducted by following the process of “thematic analysis” described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a technique usually used in grounded theory; however, according to Boyatzis (1998) thematic analysis is a tool that can be used “across different methods” (p. 78). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is a method that involves the generation and application of codes to data, and the identification, analysis and report of patterns (themes). Thematic analysis involves transcribing the data, coding, generating, and categorising themes. My analysis involved six stages suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Before I proceeded with the six stages, I selected several interviews from each category of the stakeholders I interviewed. As I did the detailed transcription myself, I realised that some interviews were more comprehensive, more elaborative than others. Thus I started my analysis with those selected. Braun and Clark’s six stages are:

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting feature of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of data analysis.
5. Defining and naming Themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specific of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating a clear definition and names for each theme. The final opportunity for analysis, Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research questions and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.
6. Producing the report	

Source: Braun and Clarke(2006, p.87)

Transcription and Translation

I transcribed the interviews in full, analysed them in Arabic, and then translated into English only those which would later be later used in the research. My decision was based on my experience with data collected for the pilot study. Although I am competent in both Arabic and English, I did realise that a more accurate meaning was achievable when analysing the data in Arabic first. The decision to analyse the data in Arabic had the disadvantage of not allowing the use of specialised software packages for data analysis. I did not have access to any software which deals with Arabic while conducting this study. Although Robson (2002) highlights the limitation of analysing data manually, especially for a large sample, encouraging the use of software

applications, I did not find analysing data manually to be burdensome, as my sample size was relatively manageable.

Coding, Themes and Sub-themes

By the time I finished conducting the interviews and transcribing the data, I had in the back of my mind a general idea of some of the major themes. Nevertheless, I wanted to dig deeper for important themes or ideas that might have been omitted by me unintentionally. I then developed codes to help me organise the themes and ideas that emerged. Coding means “naming segments of data with a label that categorizes, summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (Cohen et al, 2011). Another important thing that coding helped achieve was to pay more attention to people’s words and highlight supportive codes.

As this study adopted an approach that was not positivist, themes were developed inductively and not deductively. In another way I was keen to identify patterns in the data to generate further themes. Inductive analysis is “a process of coding the data without trying to fit into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher analytical preconception” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83).

According to Robson (2002) and Strauss and Corbin (1990), qualitative coding directs the researcher to new areas that were not considered when the research idea was initially proposed. For coding, I applied old techniques used for data analysis, such as the use of different colours to highlight different codes. I then copied and pasted relevant codes and categorised them under different themes as will be explained in the following section.

This coding can be understood as a “first level of coding” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) since I was summarizing segments of data.

After doing the first level of coding, codes were then grouped into broader themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is referred to as “pattern coding” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Pattern coding is a meta-level of coding and has the advantage of identifying “recurring phrases or common threads in informant’s accounts, or alternatively, for internal differences” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that the

“keyness” of the theme has nothing to do with the amount of data but rather with the importance of information provided to the research question being investigated. After identifying themes, I started with a higher level analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest coding and identifying themes in the data corresponding to a primary level of analysis, but higher ones should be carried out. To facilitate this process these authors suggest displaying the data in a manageable form. To address this purpose, I entered the data on thematic maps (Cohen et al., 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994) because they are good for “exploratory eyeballing” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 93). Themes emerged include the following:

- 1) English as a medium of Instruction
- 2) Admission requirement with sub-themes: elites, underachievers, and non Saudi nationals
- 3) Subjects of studies offered
- 4) Teaching learning, assessment, and extracurricular activities
- 5) Relevance to the labour market with sub-themes: practical class assignments and structured, work experience, other skills, and graduates’ professionalism
- 6) Private higher education and the state with sub-themes: the reluctant state, the controlling state, and the supportive state. In further analysis of the data I organised these topics into the current format of this thesis.

Having all the data displayed on maps I started to look for further meanings and to link themes back to the research questions. After identifying my themes and subthemes, I began a descriptive analysis of my data. I was putting quotes, developing story and establishing coherence between themes and their identified subthemes and looking for consistency and/or discrepancies, if any, among the same category of stakeholders or among different categories. From this descriptive analytical account of my data, I moved to the interpretive level by trying to discover meanings embedded in these data.

Through the analysis of interview data, I believe a mosaic emerged presenting a detailed, nuanced, and multifaceted view of a newly emerging field of education. The analysis of the interviews produced several recurring general themes with various sub-themes which will be presented in the following chapters. It is unavoidable that some of these themes overlap to some extent. Themes discussed are supported with interview quotes that are most representative of overall views, giving consideration to all viewpoints to insure neutrality and to avoid any bias.

Some interviewees are quoted more than once throughout the chapters. Interviewees' anonymity was respected. In addition, I have whether they are students, graduates, faculty members, employers, or government officials. Other than employers and governments officials, the kind of sector (public or private) for each interviewee quoted is also identified. My use of the qualitative interview approach allowed me to investigate a new field and to gain a sense of how this field appears to those who are part of it and who are shaping it as it emerges. There definitely was a sense of discovery, energy and even excitement about this development process that I hope the quoted material reflects.

The following chapters will draw on Geiger's (1986) classifications of "more", "different" and "better"--discussed in Chapter 2-- to interrogate data collected on private higher education in the KSA. While this study includes some factual data on Saudi private higher education that can be analysed in terms of Geiger's three functions this still tells us little about the actual operation of this sector. Thus, involving those who are experiencing Saudi private higher education should provide a wider, more detailed perspective on the system.

Validity and Reliability

Rigor in a study comes from the validity of the research, and the reliability of the findings (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). Initially, reliability and validity are both measures used in quantitative research but are also now used as quality criteria in qualitative research (King & Horrocks, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Robson, 2002; Silverman, 2001). Validity is a concept used in quantitative research as a powerful source of determining the accuracy of the study's findings. In Robson's words validity is "something to do with being accurate or correct or true" (2002, p. 170). While reliability in quantitative research is about the consistency in the research findings, the term is also used for qualitative studies (Creswell, 2003), and defined by Hammersley (1990; p. 57) as "the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomenon to which it refers".

The use of the terms “validity” and “reliability” in qualitative research has, however, been a topic of much debate. King and Horrocks (2010) explain that there are three positions toward using the quality criteria of validity and reliability in quantitative research. One position supports the use of the same measures; the second suggests other measures are to be considered to ensure quality criteria for qualitative research. The third position refuses any criteria to be applicable for qualitative research. Cohen et al (2007) listed 18 types of criteria for validity. Nevertheless, they suggested that not all of them need to be met in one piece of research, but rather that “the researcher needs to locate discussion of validity within the research paradigm that is being used” (p.134).

Healy and Perry (2000) suggest that these two terms should be evaluated according to the type of paradigm (i.e.,quantitative or qualitative) through which the study is conducted. According to several scholars, the terms “reliability” and “validity” are applicable to the quantitative tradition, while the terms “credibility” and “transferability” are more adequate to the qualitative one (King & Horrocks;2010). Maxwell (1992) argues against using “validity” as a criterion for qualitative research and rather found authenticity and understanding to be more appropriate. Trustworthiness of qualitative research is another measure suggested to be equivalent to validity and reliability that can be used to measure truth in qualitative research (Lincoln & Cuba; 1985). There is, as yet, no consensus among scholars about the quality criteria to be used for qualitative research with regard to validity and reliability measures.

Considering that all qualitative study has a margin of subjectivity and bias I tried to find a balance between my influence as a researcher and the internal consistency of the process (Denscombe, 1998). I tried to be very reflective during the data collection stage. In my particular case, I worked in one of the private higher education institutions where I interviewed some participants. This situation might suggest that I have presuppositions regarding private higher education but also that some of the interviewees might feel some caution in giving their answers. To enhance the validity of the interviews, I was intentionally trying to be open during the interviews, and I was inviting my interviewees to feel free in responding. In this sense, I followed recommendations from Arksey and Knight (1999) about building rapport in my interviews. I gave the participants the scope to express the way they see things, inviting their trust and openness. I did this to ensure that the interpretation of the data emerges from the analysis rather than from my imposing a previous framework or meanings thus

ensuring “interpretive validity” (Maxwell, 1992). In addition, I attempted to ensure what Maxwell (1992) calls “description validity” related to the description and the accuracy of the data gathered. To avoid incompleteness of the data gathered, I followed two techniques suggested by Robson (2002) such as audio-taping and full-transcribing of all my interviews. In this way I tried to address the validity of the data collected in order to deal with comprehensive data, and to avoid that data being distorted (Cohen et al, 2007).

To ensure the internal validity of a qualitative study there are several techniques that can be used such as triangulation, member-checking, long term observation, and peer examinations (Merriam, 2009). Given the nature of my study and time restriction, triangulation was the only technique used. In addition, distance was another factor which prevented me from getting participants to validate the transcribed interviews. Interviews were transcribed in the UK. Thus, it was not easy to communicate with the participants who reside in Saudi Arabia. Patton (2002) discusses four types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. Data triangulation is the only type employed in this study. In my research I triangulated the data through gathering information from interviews and documents. Through triangulation, a better picture can be achieved taking into consideration several levels of the phenomenon being studied (De Vaus, 2001). Thus I also considered ensuring the validity of data provided by using different levels of stakeholders--students, graduates, faculty members, and employers.

“Reliability” is traditionally understood as a measurement of the consistency of the data with the research background and is also a measurement of the suitability of the data for analysis (Saunders et al., 2009). Reliability in quantitative research is measured by using the same standardized test which should provide the same results. The situation is not so easy with qualitative research, as most methods used are not standardized (Mason, 1996). The dynamic nature of human behaviours (Cohen et al., 2007) can make it more difficult to achieve consistency in qualitative studies. I agree with Hipps’ point in this regard: “According to the constructivist notion, that reality is changing whether the observer wishes or not is an indication of multiple or possibly diverse constructions of reality” (Hipps,1993). Yin(2009) suggests, however, the operationalisation of the steps taken in the research is a way to ensure reliability. In other words, the methodology

design, data collection, analysis and conclusions should be completely documented to allow other investigators to follow similar paths.

Throughout this chapter, following Yin's suggestion, I fully described the steps I took for conducting this study. Given that the interviews were the main tool for data collection for this research, replicating the study will not necessarily produce the same results. Time, place, style of interview, and the views of participants could be factors that affect the findings. Seal (1999, p. 266) states that "trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability". To establish this trustworthiness, this research sought to understand constructed realities as interpreted by higher education stakeholders. Their contribution and interpretation are essential to provide trustworthy, valid results in the Saudi context. As the researcher, I am aware that the result of this study cannot be generalized to all contexts, but there is a possibility of generalizing the underlying logic. I am also aware that this research provides an account of one of the many truths about private higher education in the KSA, one of many truths (Francis, 2001). This study gave me the opportunity to explore the diverse views of participants so as to help me better understand the phenomenon of private higher education in the KSA.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics constitute a major component of the research literature. Robson explains that conducting research ethically "means that you follow a code of conduct for the research, which ensures that the interest and concerns of those taking part in, or possibly affected by, the research are safeguarded." (Robson, 2002, p. 18) Blaxter et al (2006, p. 158) suggests that "all social research gives rise to a range of ethical issues around privacy, informed consent, anonymity, secrecy, being truthful, and the desirability of the research." I have adopted the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) guidelines. Following these, I tried to address a number of ethical matters through the consent form provided to the participants. (See Appendix 4). The kind of relationship between the interviewer and the participants (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002) was clarified in the consent form. The consent form provided to the participants clarifies the nature of the research as well as the extent of the participants' involvement so they are aware of their role in the research.

The consent form provided to the participants assured them that their contributions to the research would be anonymous. Respecting institutional anonymity, I avoided providing background information about institutions involved in the study as it would provide the local reader with enough information to identify the institution in question. Due to the relatively small size of the Saudi higher education sector and especially its private sector, which has only recently emerged, it might have easily led to identifying the institution under discussion. This could eventually lead to identifying respondents, especially at the management level because of the limited number of people working in these positions. No interviews were recorded without the participants' permission. Participants were given the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I elaborate the research methodology for the empirical part of this study. The inadequacies of a quantitative approach have been discussed above. Based on the lack of objective information surrounding my topic—Saudi private higher education—a qualitative interpretive method was selected for exploratory purposes. It is believed that this will yield richer data and greater access to what Creswell (2003) calls “participants’ meanings”.

My study is limited in scope to three private higher education institutions and one public one, and to business majors in those institutions. I lacked the time and resources to conduct a more extensive study. Nevertheless, it is believed that the qualitative approach employed (with over one hundred stakeholders) will yield greater depth and detail than a large-scale quantitative survey might have produced.

Great care was taken with the interview process, ethically and procedurally. Detailed thematic mapping of the interview data yielded themes and subthemes which I believe are representative of the views of the study sample as a whole. But part of the benefits of this approach is that contradictory views as well as ambiguous perceptions are also in evidence in the results. The next five chapters document the use of this research method and, it is hoped, provide greater understanding of a new field of social interaction—Saudi private higher education.

PART III

The Institutional Dimension

In this part, I shall examine stakeholders' perceptions on private higher education in comparison to the public sector, through three different phases of private higher education provision: 1) the entry point, 2) the experience stage, and 3) the exit to the job market.

With regard to the Entry point, I shall present perceptions of private institutions related to admission requirements and subjects' choices. As to the Experience phase, it covers stakeholders' perceptions on private higher education in relation to institutions' pedagogy, students' learning and assessment, and extracurricular activities. Concerning the Exit phase, stakeholders' perceptions are on private higher education institutions' practices which are related to graduates' employability.

Issues in all three phases which highlight strengths and limitations in the private sector that impact its development came up repeatedly in my interviews with stakeholders. As will be shown in the following analysis chapters, the strength of the private sector lies in regarding the Entry phase in providing a desirable alternative for the wealthy elite, the underachiever, and for the non-Saudi nationals. For the Experience stage, the strength of the private sector is presented in certain pedagogical arrangements, while for the Exit phase it is seen in its practices and services which enhance graduates' employability. Perceived weakness in the public sector will help understand the emergence and the growing popularity in the private higher education sector.

In an attempt to answer our research questions on the reasons behind the emergence of the private sector of higher education, this part presents perceptions of private, and to a lesser degree, public higher education institutions in areas related to teaching, learning, and beyond. By highlighting these perceived distinct features of private higher education, we aim to conclude the possible motives behind the establishment of private higher education in the KSA. Private higher education's distinct features are not without limitations and challenges, which will be briefly covered.

Chapter 6

Entry to Private Higher Education

In this chapter, I shall look into the Entry phase of private higher education from two perspectives: admission requirements and the subject choices through the perceptions of its stakeholders. This is to add to our understanding about the nature of the sector and the impact which this has on the Saudi higher education system.

Admission requirements

Private higher education is distinguished from the public sector by its admission requirements. As was discussed earlier in Chapter 2, the charge of a tuition fee is the most noticeable difference between public and private higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia – public higher education is free for all students, but private higher education usually means a considerable financial outlay. Consequently, this has an impact upon the student groups who attend these institutions.

Another factor that influences student's choice between the two sectors is the difference in their admission standards. Admission to public higher education in Saudi Arabia is determined by their Grade Point Average (GPA) - a combination of secondary school grades and a series of standardised tests. The subjects available to applicants are determined by their results Science subjects in particular are highly competitive, while humanity subjects such as literature and business studies have lower academic requirements. In the private sector, however, the admission requirements are less strict. Students who fail to achieve the scores necessary for public universities may therefore be able to pursue their studies in a private institution. As a consequence, private institutions can sometimes be understood as primarily for students who are economically advantaged but less competent in academic performance. The sections below examine the extents to which these distinct criteria of the private sector address limitations in the public sector of higher education.

I am looking at two assumptions about student groups in private higher education. First, it serves primarily the wealthy, and second, it is the destination for those who are less competent accordingly.

The Elites? Or the Underachievers?

As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, private higher education in some countries and regions is traditionally associated with ‘elitism’ (Altbach et al., 2009; Levy 1986, 2008, 2009). ‘Elite’ in this literature refers to ‘academic elite’. Harvard University and Yale University are among the most well-known private institutions for academic elites (Altbach et al, 2009). In the case of the KSA, private higher education institutions, when they first appeared, were also seen to be serving the ‘elites’. However, the nature of this group is different in the context of Saudi Arabia. In their early days, private higher education institutions were primarily destinations for students from the middle and upper social classes. Students of similar social backgrounds were more likely to choose the same institution. At that time there was no financial support from the Government, and private institutions themselves offered few scholarships. Naturally, this affected the types of student which the sector attracted.

To some extent, the tuition fee level of the institution reflects the social class of its students. Dar Al-Hekma College, for example, when first opened, had the highest level of tuition fees in the city of Jeddah, thus attracting students from the wealthiest background. Although the academic credentials of the college were not clear to society at that time, it was perceived to be prestigious for students to be studying there. The dimension of ‘social class’ was highlighted by many of the stakeholders I interviewed. Private higher education is perceived to be prestigious. A student remarked:

“The environment here is higher class than at [a public university].”

Indeed, private higher education institutions, regardless of the social status of the students who attend them, have a more prestigious (luxurious) environment. This is evident in the new buildings and facilities they have, especially when compared with the public sector which has much older buildings. According to administrators from the private sector:

“Our market is the upper-middle social class. In the public sector, you are dealing with all sectors of society.”

Students and graduates interviewed identified social class as important to their choice of private higher education. They agreed that being with others of the same social class had a positive effect on their ability to communicate and socialise. A student commented:

“The majority of us here have the same background. We have travelled to similar places, and this affects our discussions in class, and we can easily be together out of class.”

Another student shared the same opinion:

“For example, the experience that I gained from travelling abroad might be different from the experience of someone who has not travelled at all. For those who do travel, there are many common things between them.”

A student from a private institution associates development in communication to being with a similar social class:

“In public universities, with the diversity among students enrolled, not much communication takes place, but in private colleges, since the majority have the same cultural background, they tend to communicate more.”

Interestingly, private higher education institutions are also seen as prestigious by students from the public sector:

“Even if we [students from the public sector] were competent in English, graduates of private institutions have their own prestige.”

Another student commented:

“God knows what the future of private colleges would be if [a public university] transformed and English became the medium of instruction. Then the only students who would go to private institutions would be those who wanted to show off. Still, people look up to private colleges because they are luxurious.”

This same factor, however, made some refrain from going to private higher education institutions. A student from a public institution said:

“Students in private colleges give more attention to their appearance—their bags, their watches—and I think this is an environment where I would not find myself comfortable.”

It should be noted that a significant number of students in the public universities are from rural areas where a more traditional way of life exists. Therefore, there is a marked difference in outlook and attitude in students from the cities. Most of the students in private higher education are city-dwellers, and this difference in experience may be the reason they are not that comfortable with many students in the public universities. It is not a simple question of snobbery or elitism. This is a rather complicated issue of socio-cultural identities among different social groups in the increasingly stratified society of Saudi Arabia. Some other scholars have address this phenomenon elsewhere (see Yamani, 2000 for instance), and I will not look into this issue in my thesis.

The social class factor has developed some negative perceptions about students in the private sector. A faculty member from the public sector negatively observed the attention given to students:

“Students in private institutions are ‘baby-pampered’ and this will definitely affect their personality. I believe the struggle students face here in the public sector will make them survivors.”

Data suggest that providing a prestigious environment is another perceived limitation of the public sector which the private sector is fit to address. While the public sector is seen to lack the prestigious environment that some students need, this issue still is less pressing compared to its failure to provide wider access. The private sector, on the other hand, is more willing to address this issue. This function of the private sector – widening participation in higher education, is acknowledged by the MOHE. The Ministry official interviewed identified the major role of private higher education as:

“To give a chance to many students who could not get a place in the public higher education institutions.”

A faculty member from a public university commented:

“Private education provides a desirable option for those who were not accepted to a public university.”

A student from the public sector expressed his view:

“I think 70% of the students who did not get high grades in high school went to a private college.”

A vice dean from a public university clarified the point that students who fail get into a public university are not necessarily inferior in their academic competence:

“[Private institutions provide] opportunities for those who do not have the GPA to allow them to get into public institutions, even in subjects such as economics and management. There was a time about two years ago when the minimum score to be accepted in business was 94%.”

Providers of private higher education objected to the notion that this was its main role.

A faculty member complained:

“The problem remains that some people in society don't understand that private higher education means quality, and that it isn't only a place for students who fail to get into the public sector. There is this notion that I will try in the public first and if not accepted will go to the private.”

A graduate from the private sector had the same concern:

“People used to think that private institutions were an avenue for those with low Grade Point Average.”

The introduction of scholarships gave the opportunity for high achievers from all classes to enrol in private higher education institutions. This type of scholarship is offered to students based on the results of their High School examinations. Nationals as well as non-national students are equally eligible for scholarships offered by private institutions. Later the number of students on scholarship increased with the introduction of government scholarships in 2006. However, these government scholarships are not always full scholarships. Partial scholarships are sometimes offered, depending on the High School GPA of the students applying.

A provider of private higher education commented:

“We pressured the MOHE for scholarships. Our college takes kids with very high GPA who do not have the money and couldn't get into the public universities.”

The presence of government scholarships has definitely changed this perception of private higher education as being a place for low achievers. Some interviewees remarked

that the academic quality of applicants to private higher education was improving. One faculty member from private higher education observed:

“The private sector is now competing with the public in targeting distinguished students by providing scholarships.”

Perhaps it was not economically feasible for private institutions to be exclusively for those who can pay, and thus they were keen for the Government’s scholarships. A provider of a private higher education remarked:

“At the beginning, private institutions were targeting a certain social class.”

A faculty member from the private sector explained reasons for the previously limited enrolment in the private sector:

“Many people found private provision to be mysterious and did not understand the fact that it is very expensive when public provision is not only offered for free, but students, in addition, receive stipends.”

Graduates and students of private institutions confirmed the improvement because of the Government scholarship. A graduate of a private institution remarked:

“I was informed by my friends that the presence of government scholarship has enhanced the standard in the college.”

Students from private higher education institutions agreed:

“To be honest, competition between students is very high here. Here, we have regular students and students with scholarships. The number of students with scholarships is high. Thus, you always see the kind of students who are very concerned about their studies.”

Other Students from a private institution confirmed:

“To be honest, I can see much improvement in the college from the time I started.”

“I recently realised, just before I graduated, that the college started to become stricter (in admission).”

With all the changes and developments taking place in private higher education, a faculty member from a private institution summarised the types of students now attending:

“In private institutions there are two types of student. There are those who look at private universities as a form of luxury; pampered, spoon-fed kinds of students, most of whom do not have the grades that would allow them to go to a public university. The other type is those who are more inspired to achieve.”

Despite this view that private higher education recruits students with lower GPAs than those attending public universities, the quality of students in the public universities was also criticised by some faculty members from this sector. A faculty member commented:

“Students only study before the day of the exam. They come to class mostly without any preparation, which is very depressing.”

Faculty members from the public sector held the same view:

“Students have no motivation to study at all.”

“We have a very poor quality of students.”

It was not clear whether the instructors in the public sector or the students are to blame. There appeared to be an absence of motivation from both groups of stakeholders. Students from the public sector have also criticised the quality of education they have received, as will be further discussed below.

A frequent comment from faculty of both the public and private sectors was concerning the deficiencies of secondary education. Both sectors blamed the general education system for the quality of students coming to them. The quality of secondary schools, in particular, has been a serious issue. Secondary schools have depended on the same obsolete curriculum for many years. The problems in general education were not limited to the curriculum but also to the competence of the teachers. One problem with the teaching profession in the KSA is that the system did not require them to be licensed before teaching. The quality of teaching in general schools was felt to be a basic factor affecting the end-product of general education in the KSA. The Government policy of Saudisation of the professions, including teaching in general education, has contributed to the problem. This process began 15 years ago. Before then, the country depended on

instructors from other Arab countries who were, to some extent, better trained. In social terms, the teaching profession was beheld by many to not be a prestigious one.

The Non-Saudis

The pool of students in private higher education institutions in the KSA is distinct from its public counterpart, which has limited admission for foreign students. For this study, I interviewed some students and graduates who were non-Saudi nationals. Almost all the foreign students in private institutions are the children of expatriates working in the Kingdom. Opportunities for non-Saudi nationals to study in the Saudi public higher education sector were possible until the late 1980s, when pressure for admission to the public sector forced a reversal of the policy. The exception to this was the Al-Madinah University in which non-Saudis are admitted to Islamic studies and courses. This situation disadvantaged expatriates and their children, especially Arabs and other Muslims who traditionally prefer not to send their daughters away to study. This caused many expatriates to leave the Kingdom when their children needed access to higher education. In many cases it was not easy for those children to go back to live in their own countries after spending most of their lives in the KSA. A faculty member who teaches in both sectors explained:

“Public universities used to admit non-Saudis, but as their numbers passed Saudis, especially in subjects such as science, the pressure on admission into the public sector forced a reversal of this policy. And that was a main reason for stopping non-Saudis from getting higher education. This created frustration for expatriates.”

A former dean of a private college added:

“Private institutions are definitely important for the children of expatriates. As you are aware, they constitute a large number of the population, and as the Government failed to secure higher education for their children, the private provision presence is important.”

A non-Saudi graduate reflected on the traumatic situation for non-Saudis who wanted higher education before the existence of private higher education:

“I have been living all my life here in Saudi. I have not been anywhere else. I do not think I would be able to survive living in Yemen. All my family is here. Coming

from a conservative family, travelling is also an issue. I always had the feeling that I would only finish secondary education. The existence of private institutions was a great relief.”

Additionally, although they are not eligible for government scholarships, they are eligible for the highly competitive institutional scholarships offered in the private sector. A non-Saudi student from the private sector remarked:

“I’m non-Saudi. The second option was to do a higher education degree with an institution in my country at a distance, through my embassy, but I heard about [this private college] and that they offer scholarships.”

Among non-Saudi nationals in the KSA are non-Arabs whose children attended international schools in the country for their general education. These international schools are mostly established by embassies to accommodate their own nationals. In these schools, students are hardly exposed to the Arabic language. Thus, even if the public sector was open for them, their lack of fluency in Arabic would limit their access to public universities, which use Arabic for instruction.

A Pakistani student from a private sector who does not speak Arabic explained:

“Being non-Arabs, we really have limited opportunities for higher education here in the KSA. I have learned that there are some exceptions for admitting non-nationals in public universities, but still this will be an opportunity only for those who speak Arabic.”

While non-nationals are denied access to the public higher education system, they find themselves in a better position than other students in private higher education institutions. These non-nationals have probably attended schools in the Kingdom which are foreign-operated and with foreign curricula and so have a head start over the rest of the country’s students because of their competence in English. Consequently, the presence of these students in private institutions has been valued by some stakeholders. Instructors find foreign students to be more serious and dedicated and their presence helps to raise the academic standards of the institution.

Perhaps this is affected, to a large extent, by the kind of general education which those students received. These international schools do not fall under the control of the Ministry of Education. They have different curricula from those of national public and private institutions. An international school in the KSA teaches the same curriculum as

used in its own country which is, to some extent, more advanced than those of local Saudi schools with its emphasis on generic skills. In addition to teaching in English, they discourage memorisation and focus on developing the student's analytical and problem-solving skills. Assessments in national schools depended on memorisation, with no emphasis on teaching students how to learn or how to search for information. This assessment did not apply to international schools and a number of prestigious and well-recognised private secondary schools. A graduate, who took her general education in an international school, commented:

“I found my general schooling was more challenging than my college years. We used to work very hard. They taught us to be independent, which I can see many of my friends here in the college are missing.”

Thus, in addition to the fact that the private higher education sector is providing access to non-Saudi nationals who have very limited access in the public sector, the quality standards are improved with the presence of those students who cooperatively received better quality general education. Again data suggest that the public sector has failed to address the demand of some groups.

Subject choices

Through my research, I came to discover that one of the main factors influencing a student's decision to enrol in private institutions has been students' subject choices.

Some Saudi studies have criticised the public sector for not producing graduates in the quantity and quality that fulfil the needs of the market (Abdullah, 1994; Al-Habeeb, 2006; Al-Zahrani, 2003; Al-Turkustani, 1998; Hafis, 1998; Ministry of Planning, 2005). Statistics show that specialisation in the humanities and social sciences represents 80% of university graduates in education and religious studies (MOHE, 2005). Graduates with such subjects are believed to have saturated the market. Factors influencing students' choice of these subjects are institutional. Al-Zahrani (2003) argues that public higher education institutions have failed to provide subjects which are needed in the labour market and for development, and in linking admission quota to those needs the public universities have a higher admission quota in the schools of humanities and social sciences, as these do not require the land and expensive facilities that are needed in the

science disciplines. While private institutions offer subjects provided by the public sector, the private sector has also been entrepreneurial in offering subjects which were neglected by the public sector.

Levy (1986a, 2003) provides a comparative analysis on the subjects offered by private and public higher education institutions in Latin America (Levy, 1986a). Cao (2008) also has made deep investigation of the kinds of subjects offered by private and public higher education institutions in China, while Fried et al. (2007) studied European countries, and they all have consistent observation on the kinds of subject offered by private higher education institutions. Levy (2003) explains that newly developed private higher education institutions generally offer subjects which require less financial commitment and more modest facilities. Amral et al. (2007) suggest a resource-dependence theory to be a guiding rule for private higher education institutions. They explained that private higher education institutions tend to offer subjects that are of low cost and meet students' and market needs, as they depend on tuitions and fees taken from students for their survival. Levy (1986a, 2003) and Cao (2008) both observed that public institutions offer subjects which are more traditional, while in private institutions subjects of market orientation and a commercial element are offered. I have briefly examined the difference between subjects offered in public and private institutions through the perceptions of the stakeholders. But I do not intend to make a comparison of subjects available in two sectors here. It is, however, an area worth further investigation.

The chart provided in Appendix 5 illustrates degree programmes currently being offered by private higher education institutions in the KSA. They cover a wide spectrum, ranging from low-cost to high-cost subjects. Private providers' investments in high-cost subjects differ from the norm. Private higher education in the KSA began with a few colleges, and conforms to Levy's observation (1986a, 2006a) that the private sector tends to be specialised and is most likely to serve a niche market. For example, one college started with a complete concentration on business-related subjects. Another concentrated on hospitality and tourism, while three offered subjects in engineering. Other colleges offered mixed courses from many subjects. An example of this is Dar Al-Hekma College in Jeddah, which offers graphic and interior design subjects (the arts); nursing (health sciences); law (political science); special educational needs (education); and banking, finance, and information management (business administration).

Subjects in the humanities are offered by only three private higher education institutions. One is Effat University, which offers psychology and early childhood development. Another is Dar Al-Hekma College, which offers special education. Dar Al-Uloom University, in Riyadh, offers the two latter subjects. However, the highest concentration is in health sciences such as medicine, pharmaceutical studies, and nursing, which are offered by more than one third of private higher education institutions.

Based on my personal observation of and working experience in the private sector, I tend to believe that the degree of specialisation in private higher education institutions, however, is most likely to decrease, as most of the private colleges have become, or are in the process of becoming, universities. The majority of private higher education institutions started as small colleges, and around seven of them have now become universities. A private institution in the KSA is entitled to become a university once it has three or more colleges or more. The main concern is that private institutions may continue to expand and this would result in their being the same as public institutions. Levy (2002) describes the transformation of private institutions to the public model as “isomorphic”.

Private higher education institutions in the KSA are consistent with Levy’s (2003) findings, in that they are innovative and in many cases influence changes in their counterparts in the public sector. Private institutions took the lead in establishing colleges which specifically focused on the subject of business administration. Almost none of the public higher education institutions had a separate college for this subject. For example, in the KAAU of Jeddah, the subject came under the College of Economics and Administration. Private institutions were the first to allow students to specialise in marketing, banking, finance, human resources, logistics, hospitality, tourism, management information systems, and quality management.

There was no possibility of such specialisation in the public sector. In the KAAU, for example, during the 1990s students could only study in four areas: public administration, business administration, accounting, and economics. However, I recently learned that the KAAU, a public institution, is now offering similar tracks to those that some private institutions are offering. These include management, marketing, accounting, international business, hospital management, and management information systems. In 2006, two public higher education institutions have introduced additional specialisations

in hospitality and tourism management, namely the KAAU and KSU, after they were first offered by Prince Sultan Private College in 2001. Students in business-related subjects mentioned that they preferred the private sector as some specialised courses were not available in the public sector (some have become available recently).

A student from the private sector explained:

“[A public university] offers business administration, but it is not specialised.”

Another student said:

“There is no marketing specialisation in the public university.”

An administrator from the private sector confirmed and highlighted how they took the lead in offering new subjects:

“We offered more specialised subjects, but the public sector has followed us.”

Faculty in the public sector emphasised the flexibility which the private sector of higher education has for being responsive to the market needs. A member of staff from a public sector faculty commented:

“Private colleges are more flexible in meeting the market needs. Where for us it takes too long from the time an idea is initiated till its inception. The process to get approval for any adjustment in course plan might take up two years; the market need would by then be changed.”

A faculty member from the private sector echoed this view:

“As the public sector is far too slow, the private sector will be better in meeting those needs. [A public university] has the same departments which were built 60 years ago—the same people even.”

In addition to the fact that it is more profitable and feasible for private institutions to offer subjects that are market-oriented (James, 1993), meeting the market need is among the Saudi Government’s licensing requirement. Before a private higher education institution can operate, it has to provide the Ministry of Higher Education with a feasibility study report detailing the programmes to be provided, which must be in subject areas that are needed in the labour market or for the economic development of the country. While programmes offered by private institutions were approved by the Ministry for their suitability to the market need and development, there are ongoing

debates going about the kinds of subjects that should be offered by private institutions. Some programmes offered by private institutions were criticised. An ex-faculty member from a public university said:

“There continues to be a lack of strategic planning on the kind of subjects being offered by private higher-education institutions in the KSA. Many students are now specialising in fine arts. Do you think we need that many students in such subjects? There are many sectors in the country that are still short of good-calibre staff. For example, why have none considered desalination?”

Not all interviewees agreed that private institutions should provide subjects which are needed in the labour market. For example, among my interviewees were those who called for more subjects which are not merely market-oriented to be included in the programmes of private institutions. A vice dean of a private institution said:

“As educational institutions, we should not only base our decision on programmes offered on instrumental motivation which mainly focuses on labour market needs. We, rather, need to consider other subjects that students would like to take because they like them. Students might, for example, pursue childhood education to be better mothers or English literature if they are passionate about Shakespeare. Hence, you cannot ignore this sector of society.”

The vice dean from the public sector commented:

“Private institutions should consider offering subjects like sociology and many others needed to deal with the vast societal transformation, which is not always for the good of the people.”

I think that it is beneficial for the private sector that the Ministry does not specify certain subjects which the private sector needs to cover, but rather left it open . Labour market needs are changing too fast, and market needs are thus in continuous change. Among my interviewees, there were those who had the same opinion and liked the fact that the Government has not specified subjects for private institutions to offer but instead left it open. A faculty member from the private sector commented:

“I do not prefer that the Government identifies the market needs. Private institutions can create a market for new professions that aren't there yet. If the Government is involved it might restrict or limit the private sector.”

A faculty member remarked:

“The Government sometimes doesn’t have the foresight to know what is needed and what is not. The Government is a bit slow, the private sector is more tuned to the market, is aware of the changes taking place, and has the ability to respond.”

Donn and Al-Manthri (2010) has argued that private higher education institutions in the Arab Gulf states offer courses which are totally market-oriented, neglecting people’s interests and needs. However, interviewed providers of higher education explained that they base their decision on the kind of subjects they offer by surveying employers, parents, and students. That suggests that private institutions address different markets in the kinds of subject they offer. Faculty respondents discussed the importance of offering subjects likely to meet stakeholders’ needs:

“We conduct feasibility studies before offering any programmes, where we interview and survey stakeholder's opinions.”

The relevance of subjects to the labour market was a concern for many students interviewed. Interviewed administrators at private institutions also explained that many students, before applying for a specific degree programme, ask whether employment opportunities are available after graduation. Indeed, employment was still a strong consideration. Students from private institutions explained:

“I considered going to [a private sector college] to study graphic or interior design, but I was not sure about the career path, thus I decided to do my BA in business.”

“I, for example, had a great interest in interior design, but my father then convinced me that the interior design profession for women is still not widely accepted in our culture. As to entering people's houses, there are still no regulations to protect women in this type of profession. Not like a business major.”

Apart from being related to the market need, a major advantage which students have expressed in relation to subjects offered by private institutions is that they have the freedom to choose the major they want as long as they pass the admission requirement (which is less restrictive than that of the public sector). Admission requirements in the public sector are more restricted because of the sector’s limited capacity. To a significant degree, limited capacity controls students’ admission and their concentration in certain fields, a factor which explains why students do not always end up studying in the field of their choice. Students from the private sector remarked:

“I wanted to major in Management Information Systems at [a public university] but my GPA was not up to the requirements.”

“I started at [a public university] but I wasn't happy with my major. I wanted to change, but it was difficult because of my low-grade point average (GPA).”

This confirms one of the justifications suggested by Fried et al. (2007p.649).on private higher education institutions replicating subjects offered by the public sector as being:

“The high demand for additional places, a perception that poor quality provision prevails in the public sector and the conviction that better quality provision can be achieved with different organisational framework in terms of structure and the execution of study programmes”.

Indeed, while market need is important, private institutions should consider offering subjects which match students' interests, even if they do not match the market need. It was interesting to find that some students interviewed considered enrolling in private higher education because of personal interests in particular subjects. They said:

“I wanted to specialise in something that I like.”

“My personal interest was a priority over the employability aspect.”

New Professions for Women

In relation to the kinds of subject offered by private institutions, it is worth noting that private institutions also took the lead in establishing subjects available for female students for the first time. These subjects include: graphic design, architecture, law, special education, and electrical engineering.

As we have seen earlier in Chapter 3, women's involvement in the labour market is limited. The reason is partly the limited subjects available to them (Al-Munajjed, 2010; Ramadi, 2005). Student-gender segregation in the public universities has meant that some subjects have not been available for women. Indeed, this is a significant thing in a context where students had limited opportunities in the kinds of subject which they could pursue. A student remarked:

“It was exciting to be among the first to study in areas which we girls in Saudi Arabia had never imagined ourselves in.”

An administrator from the private sector remarked:

“I can see a lot of development in what women in Saudi Arabia think they can do. Our girls wanted to study engineering. They want to study about computers and explore how machines work, but these are fields where there are no opportunities for them yet in the public sector.”

Employing graduates of these new subjects, however, remains a major concern. Unless the labour market becomes ready to absorb graduates, the impact of private institutions offering new subjects for women would still be a challenge later on in their lives. The fact that women need to be segregated from men in the workplace presents a challenge for employers who do not mind recruiting students. Some respondents showed concern over the employment opportunities for women:

“There is a significant phenomenon with the private institutions, which is that they are targeting females, where all of these graduates will be going to the job market.”

“I chose business, as it provides better employment opportunities than other subjects. Not many professions are open to women in Saudi. I really want to work. I decided to choose a major that would ensure my employment, thus I decided even marketing.”

A faculty member of a private institution echoed the same concern, but showed some hope:

“Although I have my doubts about where these graduates in architecture will be working, I still feel that because of the fast development in the country, there will be available positions for them soon.”

This discrepancy between subjects offered to women and availability of jobs in the labour market is similar to the case of the KAAU, when they offered students the option of a business degree when women did not have the opportunities to be in the job market.

Many stakeholders clearly perceived the public sector as falling short in its provision of some subjects. My interviewees described these shortfalls as occurring either because subjects were not offered in the public sector at all, as in the case of business specialisations, or because subjects were offered but only with an insufficient number of

places, or because subjects were offered but not open to students. The ability of the private sector to fill these gaps in public sector provision was a recurrent theme.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked into the Entry phase concerning private higher education from two perspectives: admission requirements (tuition fees and admission standards) and the subject choices. For the former, private institutions are more likely to be dominated by students from a wealthy background, as a tuition fee is charged in the private sector while the public sector remains free for all. There exists a noticeable correlation between students' social background and their enrolment in private institutions. Social class plays a role in the private sector as many students have come from upper income groups who can afford the tuition. Many come in search of better quality. There is also a status element involved but students were more comfortable with those of a similar background. However, this situation has gradually changed with the introduction of scholarships in the private sector, funded by both the Government and the institutions themselves. Private institutions also impose a lower admission requirement than the public sector, making it a desirable alternative for those who cannot enrol in a more competitive public sector institution. Students with lower GPAs—although not necessarily underachievers—also gain access to higher education in the private sector. The public sector has become very selective because of high demand. While there were early perceptions of private higher education as being a place for “the elite” or “low achievers,” this has changed. Government scholarships—awards based on high GPAs—have also brought stronger academic talents to these new schools. Also, the private sector endorses a more open policy towards non-Saudi students (the children of expatriate workers) offering them opportunities of higher education that are denied to them in the public sector. Non-Saudis thus gain access to higher education even though they are not allowed into the public universities.

In terms of the issue of subject choices, my student interviewees tended to perceive private higher education as offering students access to subjects, especially for women, which they would otherwise be unable to study. Through my research, I came to learn that one of the main factors influencing a student's decision to enrol in private higher education institutions and not the public has been what kind of subject the student wants to pursue, i.e. the courses and subjects offered. Although there is some overlap between the two, many private sector colleges offer more specialised subjects, particularly in the field of business studies. In addition, private institutions offer subjects to students which are not available to them in the public sector.

Chapter 7

Experiences of Private Higher Education

—Teaching, Learning, and Beyond

Introduction

In this chapter, I shall explore the private sector from a number of dimensions: teaching, learning and assessment, and extracurricular activities. By looking into these aspects of private higher education, I aim to explore the possible reasons behind the establishment and development of private higher education in the KSA, with reference to the views and perceptions of those who are most immediately involved in the higher education system. My analysis in this chapter also shows that private higher education, although being distinct in many ways, is not without limitations and challenges.

Teaching and learning

In general, most of my interviewees, students and faculty members alike, have positive views about the general quality of their private institutions, when comparing them with the local public counterparts. Some respondents were highly critical of the quality in the public sector. For instance, a faculty member at one of the chosen institutions, who is also a graduate of a public university, criticised that public university based on her personal experience. She said, university A

“... is like an old factory which is ... producing graduates with obsolete standards. If I were to work in a private university with the qualification that I gained from (university A), I would have faced a major challenge. There would have been a great gap between my knowledge and what the market requires from me. I was fortunate to be exposed to international education as it prepared me well for my job.”

Here, the interviewee identifies one of the major problems facing the public sector - a lag between the requirement of a changing market, or in a wider sense, a changing society. She also referred to her exposure to international education, implying that the

public sector is lagging behind an international standard, and failing to prepare its students for what is required of them in the real world. In other words, the idea of employability is at play here in her concern of quality.

Administrators of private institutions believed themselves to be providing better quality education than the public sector. A vice dean from the private sector explained:

“the private sector can target its particular niche group of people that it is capable of serving ... That is to say, it can focus on more a small number of people by providing a high quality of education in certain selected areas, without covering the whole spectrum of education. The Government wants public institutions to provide education in all areas, but they obviously limit their scope.”

Here, for the vice dean, identifying the main advantage of the private sector is its capacity to accommodate students' demands, in comparison to the public sector which is required to perform its mission to provide universal knowledge.

To have access to 'better education' was the most common answer among many students interviewed to the question of their reason for choosing a private institution. A graduate from the private sector remarked:

“If you want to study in English, if you want good education, and for someone who wants to go for further education and work, private institutions are the best option.”

Here, this interviewee indicated an awareness of the advantage of the private sector. English language education, for instance, is a major attraction, and so is the quality of provision in terms of long-term benefits - further education and employment. Some students and graduates from private institutions showed the same positive views about private institutions as an alternative to overseas studies. Two students made the following comments:

“Going abroad was not an option for me. I was looking at local institutions only which are up to international standards.”

“In regard to the aspect of education, private institutions are a good alternative to going abroad.”

A graduate from the private sector explained:

“When we had to leave our universities in the US because of 9/11, [a private institution] was the only comparable alternative.”

Another graduate based her comments of the private sector on a real experience, and said:

“private institutions offer the same knowledge as international institutions. I attended an exchange programme, and I found myself up to its level; I did not find myself less knowledgeable than my classmates who came from other international institutions. At first I had some doubts about our local institutions, but after I was speaking with other students, I found that I had taken the same courses.”

A faculty member from the private sector who is a graduate of a public sector remarked:

“When I evaluate private provision based on my local and international experience with education, I find the private sector to be localising the international quality of education. The private sector has had a big leap forward in university education provision, while the public sector will need many years to catch up and will need to seriously reflect upon their whole sector.”

Noticeably, there was a widely held negative impression of the quality in the public sector. However, the majority of the interviewees in the chosen public institutions, academics and administrators in particular, claimed that such an impression was only a stereotyped prejudice. Almost all faculty members interviewed from the public sector were positive about the public sector during the interviews. However, I find it rather difficult to determine whether this widespread positive perception reflected their genuine opinions or was a mere defence of the public sector in which they found themselves. They seemed to have a rather generalised view about the public sector, coloured by their perception of certain subjects such as medicine, which obviously has a higher standard in the public sector. One of the interviewees, for example, commented:

“See how many laboratories we have here in the public university. Do you think private institutions can match up in terms of facilities?”

Another interviewee added:

“All famous doctors in hospitals are faculty in the public universities.”

All my interviewees from the public sector—except one— had the perception that ‘private’ equals ‘for-profit’ and that quality of education always suffers from a pursuit of

profits. They believed that the public sector would always be superior in academic performances.

It seems that these were only stakeholders' general impressions about both sectors, as my further discussions with different stakeholders shed light on factors which are not necessarily consistent with those articulated views, especially those from providers of the public sector. These include the following: English as a medium of instruction, quality of educational materials, teaching methods used, and extracurricular activities.

Class Size and 'Special Attention'

A noticeable difference between private and public higher education institutions is class size. The impact of class size on the quality of teaching, output and students achievements has been discussed in the literature. Hancock(1996), for example argues that the quality of teaching is reduced when classrooms are overcrowded because resources are spread thinly to accommodate larger numbers of students. Noble (2000) suggests that it is not feasible for educators to have effective teaching in large classrooms. A study done by Adeyemi (2008) finds that the quality of output is better in schools with small class sizes than with larger ones. According to McKeachie (1980):

Analysis of research suggests that, in general, large classes are simply not as effective as small classes for retention of knowledge, critical thinking, and attitude change. Few instructors are satisfied with the achievement of knowledge if it is not remembered, if the students are unable to use it in solving problems where the knowledge is relevant, or if the students fail to relate the knowledge to relevant attitudes. If one takes these more basic outcomes of retention [of knowledge],problem solving, and attitude differentiation as criteria of learning, the weight of the evidence clearly favours small classes (pp. 182 & 185).

While the impact of class size on students' achievement is still under debate (Williams et al., 1985), my interviewees found small class size to have a positive impact on the quality of education they receive. The number of students in private institutions is relatively low. Although the number has been increasing with government scholarships for the private sector, the number of students is still very low compared with the public sector. Arab (2007) has cited a ratio of 16 students per teacher in private institutions compared with a ratio of 23 students per teacher in the public universities (pp. 74, 75). However, I still think the latter ratio is much lower than currently is the case. I was a student in the public sector and the class size averaged 45 students. My interviews with stakeholders from the public sector confirmed that the ratio was still high. Faculty in private institutions (who came from the public sector) admitted that the size of the class and the number of students were factors which had an effect on the quality of teaching. Instructors in private institutions from the public sector appreciated the effect this has

on their teaching methods and assessments. One instructor commented about her experience in the public sector:

“I used to have more than a hundred students in one session. You can imagine how difficult it was to be able to recognise each student I was teaching. I depended primarily on exams for assessments. That said, however, my exams had mostly ‘true’ or ‘false’ and multiple-choice questions.”

She then compared that with her experience in the private sector:

“Here, I know every student I am teaching. I have the tendency to give my students more assignments and projects, as I do not have the worries I had in the public sector about correcting hundreds of reports and assignments.”

Other private higher education institution faculty members (who are graduates of public universities) commented on the difference in the attention given to students:

“I envy our students for the time and attention they receive from us. I remember my university days in a public university when we could barely have a chance to ask a question because of the large number of students in the class.”

“Students of private institutions are benefiting much more. It goes back to the fact of the number of students. In public universities, you can have up to 80 students in public universities. Instructors as a result do not recognise all their students. There is no individual attention.”

A vice dean of a private college highlighted the smaller class sizes in private institutions and the benefits students receive from this:

“The most important thing that we pride ourselves for is the limited number of students compared to the public sector. Our services are customised, which will definitely benefit students on the personal and academic levels.”

A number of private sector students interviewed affirmed that class size is one of the factors which made them perceive private higher education to be a better kind of education; they are looking for what they called ‘special attention’. As a student from a private institution remarked:

“As public institutions have larger numbers of students, there is no special attention given to students. In addition, instructors will find it difficult to apply practical aspects to the course.”

Many of the students from the private sector were pleased with a greater variety of classroom activities which smaller class sizes allowed:

“In most classes we are required to make presentations.”

“We do presentations, case studies, and projects.”

“We have projects, research, and presentations.”

Students in the public sector, however, are not exposed to these teaching approaches. One student from the public sector explained:

“Since I have started my degree in the public university I have not done a single presentation. Each instructor comes and talks and our job is to write down what they say.”

A vice dean of a private college emphasised the attention given to their instructors’ teaching:

“We instruct our professors in class to encourage group discussion, student initiative, and innovation.”

A faculty member from a private institution confirmed:

“Generally instructors vary in their method of teaching. But I assure you that at least in my department, there is interactive lecturing. We here [in a private institution] consider developing cognitive skills in our students.”

Students from the public sector were also aware of this difference in the attention given to students between the two sectors. A graduate from the public sector commented:

“At the public university instructors’ efforts are distributed among a large number of students. Students then get less attention compared to that gained by students in private institutions. Still, we cannot blame the instructors for that as they are overloaded and have too many responsibilities to handle large numbers of students.”

Another student from the public sector added:

“There were [105] students in one class. You can imagine what our learning outcomes in the class would be. We can hardly hear the instructor.”

A student from the public sector compared his experience with students from private institutions:

“I feel there is special attention given to every student in private institutions.”

Interestingly, some students from the public sector realised the impact this was having on students from the private sector. A Student from the public sector commented:

“Students [from the private sector] have strong personalities. I think the method of teaching there is better.”

More than half of the private sector students interviewed were aware of the ‘special attention’ factor. They considered themselves privileged by the attention they received inside and outside the classroom. A student from the private sector compared herself with her sister in the public sector:

“The instructors here care about you. My sister [a student at a public university], for example, does not know her instructors. Nor do her instructors know her. Whereas here I have good relations with the instructors. I go to their offices. I exchange email with them, and have discussions with them—even aside from the subjects they are teaching.”

This level of attention was perceived as being very important, especially for students who received their general education in private schools because to them it was a continuation of what they were used to.

“Coming from secondary private schools, we are used to having the school listen to us and to our complaints. I heard that public institutions are stricter, more bureaucratic; no special attention is given to students.”

Students of private institutions were not only content with the special attention given to them by their instructors but also in the cooperative attitude of their institutions’ administration. A student from the private sector commented:

“We here can go to fight and complain with the management about things that we do not like. I don’t think we would ever be able to do that in the public university.”

While administrators in private higher education institutions are concerned about their students, some were not happy about the attitude of some students. A former dean of a private institution remarked:

“Students here think that because they are paying, we are obliged to listen to anything that they require. There was a time when students did not like a particular instructor and they were extremely annoyed that we did not fire her immediately.”

Another administrator from the private sector echoed the above comment:

“Some students here [in a private institution] think since they are paying they have the right to do whatever they like.”

Interestingly, there were some contrary views on class size and the special attention given in private institutions. A student from a public university (transferring from a private institution) criticised small classes in private institutions:

“I did not like it that the classes were small; it reminded me of the High School experience.”

A student from the private sector criticised the attention given to students:

“Teachers here indulge the students, give the information, explain it. It is very wrong to blame it on the language; international students everywhere put in more effort to understand better and engage.”

Students and faculty at both public and private institutions identified the smaller class sizes at private institutions as a major difference between the two sectors. Some respondents did not bring up the issue, but no one who did contended that there were smaller classes or more personal attention given in the public sector. As has been seen, in addition to class size, the greater ‘personal attention’ paid to students by the institution as a whole was also cited. This may result from the combination of the smaller sizes of private institutions—compared to public ones—and a greater consciousness of the student as customer. A perception clearly exists that students in the private sector receive a higher level of personalised attention both from instructors and from the institution. However, as the enrolment in the private sector rises steadily, to what extent this low student-teacher ratio in these institutions is sustainable remain unclear. As one student observed:

“As the number is increasing I feel the college is paying less attention to students than before with the increase in internal scholarship.”

Assessment: They Are Not All Good!

While many perceived the superior quality of the private sector in the terms discussed above, students and graduates from the public and private sectors criticised assessment methods. Students from private institutions made similar criticisms.

A graduate from the public sector complained:

“Instructors encourage students to memorise so as to have better grades. Still, we can also blame our general education system. We are totally untrained.”

Students from the public sector displayed the same concern:

“There is too much memorisation without linking it to the real world. We need to memorise a lot to put it on the paper in the exam.”

“They taught us things on papers. I will feel better if I burn them.”

The majority of students interviewed from the public sector perceived the quality of teaching in the private sector to be better. A graduate from the public sector said:

“In private institutions they encourage them to be creative. We have seen through students’ works in private institutions’ exhibitions that they do, and here we learn only for the exam.”

Faculty members of private institutions who were also graduates of the public sector reflected on their experiences in the public sector and compared it with their private institutions:

“The teaching methods in [public institution] is about regurgitating what you have memorised from the book. There were no slides; instructors talked, we wrote, and then we were examined.”

“Here in our private university we focus on both cognitive and interpersonal skills. Cognitive skills encompass a student’s ability to analyse, observe, and synthesise. All these skills are missed in the public sector. Interpersonal skills are achieved through extracurricular activities, through assigning them projects. All these build and develop their personalities. This is an institutional effort that is not applied only in certain departments.”

She added:

“Being a graduate of the public sector, I can compare what is happening here to what I have received. When I compare my skills and personality development at the time I graduated with those of our students here [in a private institution], I feel embarrassed. The traditional way of teaching made us lose lots of valuable national resources.”

A vice dean of a private institution remarked:

“We started to look at learning theories, and we are basing our programmes on those theories. We established workshops. We then decide upon the different skills to be covered in different levels.”

However, not all students and graduates interviewed from the private sector were satisfied with assessment methods in their schools. A student from the private sector commented:

“Memorisation is still the main thing to succeed, although instructors emphasise that they do not want you to memorise.”

“I think all teachers need to become innovative. They need to consider motivating students. Traditional style of memorisation should be demolished. Students should rather encourage thinking and analysing. Instructors still rely on rote learning, when students memorise.”

Memorisation and rote learning is a serious problem in the Saudi education system which I myself experienced throughout my schooling in the country. Assessment in Saudi national schools depends on memorisation, with no emphasis on teaching students how to learn or how to search for information.

In addition to memorisation, a majority of the students and graduates interviewed from the private sector complained about other issues:

“Our instructors rarely give challenging assignments.”

“Based on what I have been hearing about the public sector, I think the quality of education in private institutions is better, but still instructors here only cover what is in the textbooks. No additional information is provided to us. Even the exams are just from the books. We are not encouraged to think and analyse; we are limited to what our books say.”

A graduate who transferred from a university in a European country to a private local one remarked:

“There are some differences in the type of exams. There [at the European University] we had more of essay questions, not like here, which to a large extent are ‘true’ or ‘false’ and multiple choice questions.”

“Not all instructors finish all chapters which we are supposed to finish, though this varies among instructors. But there are many times when we only take three quarters of the chapters in the syllabus. Whenever I compare what we are taking to my friends in the King Abdul Aziz, I find that we are taking much less.”

A few graduates also complained that not all instructors paid attention to the student’s quality of writing in English. A student from a private college did not find herself skilled enough in writing English when she started her job:

“When I first worked, I was not confident in writing reports. They did not train us in doing it.”

Another student from the private sector realised when she went to pursue her education abroad, that her grasp of academic English was inadequate:

“I was among the top students when I graduated. However, when I left for my Master's, I realised my writing ability was not up to the university standards in the private college. They did not teach us much about doing research. I used to use a referencing style which I had invented myself.”

Nevertheless, private institutions put more emphasis than the public sector on developing students’ skills and personalities, as will be seen in the following section and in the chapter that follows.

Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities as defined in the Webster dictionary are, “Activities performed by students that fall outside the realm of the normal curriculum of school or university education”. A large number of studies discuss the role of extracurricular activities in higher education. Many scholars agree that what happens in college outside the classroom can contribute to valued outcomes of college (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1995). However Clegg, Stevenson and Willott (2010) find that the boundaries between curricular and extracurricular activities are still blurred within the UK’s higher education system. Clegg et al. find that extracurricular activities include all academic activities which students have out of the classrooms. This includes: paid work, art, drama, music, faith/cultural activities, family, domestic or caring activities, political activity, sports and/or other physical activity, and volunteering (Clegg et al., 2010, p. 618).

Extracurricular activities discussed by the interviewees included: international field trips, sports activities, clubs, workshops and seminars, and lectures unrelated to specific courses but which are offered by their colleges and/or arranged by student unions. Data from the interviews conducted suggest that private higher education institutions understand the role of extracurricular activities in a much different way from their public counterparts. Participants in this study viewed extracurricular activities as having more emphasis in private higher education institutions. Employers, faculty members, and students in this study perceived that private higher education institutions provide more extracurricular activities than the public sector. The extracts below illustrate their views. An employer states:

“Private institutions provide students with extracurricular activities which prepare them better for the real world.”

Another employer explained why extracurricular activities are found less in public higher education institutions:

“The public university concentrates on academic knowledge and does not give much attention to extracurricular activities, which are important in developing students’ personalities, especially for the campus.”

Students from both public and private higher education institutions agreed that private institutions are more active in making extracurricular activities available. A student from

a private college explained his college's efforts in hosting and publicising their extracurricular activities, which would help them with networking:

“The college [a private sector college] puts a lot of effort in publicising the work of the college through the different events and activities it hosts. These really help us to know more people and develop connections far beyond what we could individually.”

Another student from the private sector perceives extracurricular activities to be an added value to the private sector:

“I considered coming to this college [private one] because of the events, activities, and clubs they have.”

One student appreciated the environment of the public sector to be more serious and depressing when compared with the private sector, which has more extracurricular activities:

“Public universities, in general, are depressing. In private colleges there are different activities. We go with movie clubs from the [private] college to Lebanon, Sharm Al-Sheikh, to really fun places ... not only studying like in the public sector.”

Another student from the private sector praised her private college for the extracurricular activities it offers:

“What is unique about this college is that they not only focus on the curricular but also extracurricular activities. They make us explore and do many things. They make us travel.”

One quarter of students interviewed from the public sector confirmed the views presented above about the differences between the public and private sectors' positions towards extracurricular activities. One student explained:

“I envy students in private institutions for the international trips their colleges take them on. For us here [in the public university] we can hardly go on field trips.”

Another student commented on the kind of extracurricular activities provided in a private higher education institution:

“When I went to visit a private college, I was amazed by the kind of workshops and activities they have. There were some ads for interesting seminars. It is something that we do not have in my university [a public one].”

Another student from the public sector commented:

“Here we hardly hear about the events taking place and if we do they are rarely exciting.”

The comment above also sheds light on a complaint that students in the public sector do not attend activities:

“Students do not look at the university as a culture. They don’t have a sense of belonging here. They just perceive it as a place to receive a degree. We try to offer a number of activities to students; however, they do not attend. ‘I want the degree so I can leave!’ The social aspect of the university is still missing.”

Such activities are very appreciated in what remains a close and restrictive society, where the means for entertainment are very limited. This is especially true for students. While employers and faculty members share the same view that extracurricular activities are more available in the private sector than in the public one, nearly one third of the interviewees (including students) perceived extracurricular activities to be valuable in developing students’ skills and personalities. According to a employer:

“It [extracurricular activity] prepares them [students] for the real world.”

One faculty member from the private sector explained how her institution tends to involve students in activities to build their personalities:

“Our graduates have been given a well-rounded education, through our curricular programmes and extracurricular activities. The latter especially make our students really stand out and shine.”

Another staff member from a private institution explained:

“In our college we encourage our students to participate in the organisations involved in public events, to volunteer, and we even offer them credits for it. We want to develop their personalities and skills. University education is not only about academic education ... it is also about character building.”

A faculty from the private sector shared this view:

“We go an extra mile with our students in terms of student development, not only professionally but also socially and community-wise through the events we host and the activities that we provide our students.”

About one third of the interviewed male and students from private higher education expressed the same view of the importance of extracurricular activities.

One student said:

“Students in private institutions, unless they involve themselves in extracurricular activities, will not be distinguished. These activities make students more confident, more familiar with the external world.”

Graduates from the private sector confirmed this view. One graduate commented:

“We had the chance to be with students from the public sector while we were doing our training in a public university. I can see that we [students from the private sector] have better opportunities to develop our skills through the extracurricular activities we have in our college. In the public university, it is more just academic life. In our private college we have the chance to meet with students from other departments, in clubs, workshops, and seminars that have nothing to do with our major.”

Another student from the private sector explained the significance of extracurricular activities in students’ development:

“The college tries to build our knowledge and personalities through inviting important figures who can be good role models for us. In addition, through the college we participate in organising conferences where we get the chance to interact and communicate with people.”

One student from the private sector observed:

“I feel my communication skills were enhanced by my college education, not only because of a communication course that is one of the degree requirements but also through activities offered by the college. I found the student union to be a very helpful avenue for students to enhance their communication skills.”

Another student from the private sector added:

“Through being involved in the student union, we were dealing with the real world before we graduate. We were operating like a small organisation inside the college where we had to plan, organise, and make decisions.”

With all the praise for extracurricular activities in the private sector, a few students had some qualifying comments. A major concern shared by one third of private sector students was the timing of the activities. According to one student:

“Indeed, in the college there are always many interesting activities and workshops going on. The problem, however, is with their timing. Most of the time they are being held at the time of our lectures so we cannot attend.”

Other students commented on the kinds of workshop and activity being offered in the private college:

“This is my fourth year in the college. I do not see the college being innovative with their workshops and activities. The same activities are being repeated. We want new things.”

A quarter of the students interviewed from the private sector suggested that more extracurricular activities should be offered in their college. One student said:

“We might be in a good position with extracurricular activities when we compare ourselves to the public sector. But I think we definitely need more activities in the college.”

One can see from the extracts above that private higher education institutions are perceived to provide more extracurricular activities than their public counterparts. However, some faculty participants provided explanations for the limits on extracurricular activities in the public sector. A faculty participant from the public sector cited the bureaucratic nature of the public sector:

“The bureaucracy in the public sector hinders us from doing many activities that would definitely develop students’ skills. For example, it’s a big challenge to take students anywhere, even if it’s for academic purposes.”

Another faculty member expounded the same view:

“Private institutions have more freedom in inviting highly recognised people. For us [in the public sector] it is a long process if we want to do so. We end up going to [the private institutions] and to other places with our students, as this is the only

opportunity that our students might have to see important international politicians and influential business and industrial leaders. And this is the result of the bureaucracy that we have here in the public university.”

Another faculty member from the public sector agreed on the flexibility and freedom which private higher education institutions have over public ones. She introduced ‘a packed curriculum’ as another factor limiting students’ involvement in extracurricular activities:

“Private colleges arrange events that we [in the public university] cannot easily do, or invite a guest speaker that we cannot easily host. It might sound strange that we go to [the private higher education] colleges taking some of our students because we cannot have these types of events within our packed curriculum. Ongoing classes from 8 am to 2 pm do not allow our students time to be involved in extracurricular activities.”

The greater flexibility which private institutions have over public ones was discussed by almost half of the faculty members interviewed. According to a faculty member from the private sector:

“The private sector has more flexibility than the public sector with curricular and extracurricular activities.”

Extracurricular activities were an area in which interviewees perceived a clear deviation between public and private institutions. Respondents at all levels, including students and faculty in both sectors, noted that private institutions tended to provide more extracurricular activities for their students. These were seen as being beneficial to students, even if the uptake was not always high.

Participants’ positive views on the benefits which extracurricular activities can have on students’ characters and skills are consistent with the literature on the subject. Interview responses repeatedly demonstrated that extracurricular activities are important for the development of students’ skills and character. All participants who discussed extracurricular activities acknowledged their importance, although not all felt that there were enough of them or that they were well implemented. Student responses relating to extracurricular activities varied. Most who mentioned them did so favourably. They acknowledged their positive role. This is unsurprising, given that many of them raised the subject in response to discussions related to the development of skills. Others discussed extracurricular activities in response to questions about perceived disparity

between public and private institutions. Most students viewed these activities positively, particularly when they involved travelling to other countries. Data gathered from students on this matter suggest that students' extracurricular activities are not only about development of skills, but also about having fun and enjoying college life beyond any academic demands.

The extracts given also illustrate that private institutions, by providing more extracurricular activities for their students, are providing them with more opportunities which "could enable them to consolidate and build" their social and human capital than public higher education institutions can (Clegg et al., 2010, p. 619). Scholars such as Yorke and Knight (2004) and Barri (2004, 2006) cite the relevance of extracurricular activities when discussing graduates' outcomes and graduates' employability. Their studies suggest that extracurricular activities can contribute to the development of the generic skills important in the labour market. Tchibozo and Passture (2007) have also discussed the positive effect which extracurricular activities can have on graduates' transition from higher education to the labour market, which is related to the next chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked into the Experience phase through aspects related to teaching, student's learning, assessment and extracurricular activities. Stakeholders perceive significant differences in quality between the private and public sectors in terms of quality of teaching class size, and emphasis on extracurricular activities. Student-teacher ratios are lower in the private schools, which is appreciated by students and teachers alike. Students also benefit from the greater personal attention in smaller classes. Extracurricular activities in the private schools were understood to be much better than in the public sector. Students are appreciative that such activities are given greater emphasis. They feel that this helps them develop their personalities and skills—a view shared by employers. Some students in the private sector wanted even more of these activities. While there are some dissenting judgments and criticisms made of private higher education, it seems that it is succeeding in providing higher quality education—at least that is the way it is perceived by those most closely involved.

Chapter 8

The Exit phase

- Private Higher Education and Graduates' Employability

This chapter is about the Exit phase dimension. In this chapter, I propose to examine private higher education's relationship with the labour market. This will be discussed through private institutions' services and practices which have an impact on students' employability. Discussion of this will involve practical learning, structured work experience, and career centre services.

Background

As a key regional player in the Middle East economy, Saudi Arabia is investing in the development of its human resources to facilitate a gradual transition away from reliance on its hydrocarbon resources. The Government needs a qualified workforce to compete in this era of global competitive economy and to replace the great number of foreign workers that the private sector still prefers. This dependence leads to less employment of Saudi citizens. The last two decades have witnessed heavy investment at all levels of education, which has led to higher numbers of university graduates. The employability of these graduates, however, remains a key challenge facing both the graduates themselves and policymakers.

The relatively high unemployment rate among graduates in the Kingdom has been a serious issue facing the country's government leaders (Ministry of Planning, 2005). In the past, unemployment was not a serious concern for the Government or the private sector because the vast structure of the public sector absorbed all university graduates. The public sector used to be the primary destination for higher education graduates. Furthermore, tasks in the public sector were routine and required a minimal level of skills. This guarantee of a public-sector job for all university graduates induced in them a false sense of security, making them less concerned about the kinds of skill they obtained. The Government sector had been the provider of almost all services.

However, the public sector has now been challenged by an oversupply of graduates, and it is no longer able to guarantee jobs for all graduates.

In its fourth Five-Year Development Plan (1985), the Government decided to involve the private sector in the development effort and assigned to it the task of accelerating the employment of Saudi nationals. As was discussed in Chapter 3, the Government even introduced the ‘Saudisation’ policy in the 1990s to reduce reliance on foreign labour and to increase employment opportunities for Saudis. Prior to the introduction of this policy, the private sector might not have worried about the quality of the Saudi university graduates as employers preferred hiring foreign workers. That preference was challenged by the “Saudisation” initiatives. Employers still do not find university graduates to be matching their needs (Al-Hamid and Jamjoom, 2009; Al-Humaid, 2002; Al-Khudair, 2001, Ghaban et al. 2002). While the Government is trying to solve the unemployment issue through its policies directed towards the labour market, the market’s complaints about the quality of higher education graduates has been a persistent one. Unless graduates become better prepared for the labour market, the private sector will continue to be challenged by effectively employing them.

The literature about private higher education suggests that the public sector’s failure to meet labour market needs is among the chief motives for the emergence of private higher education (Cao, 2008; Levy, 1986a, 2006a). This chapter will examine the extent to which this is the case in the Saudi context. Preceding that, the literature on graduates’ employability is surveyed.

Higher Education and Graduates' Employability

Employability as a concept has been used in some government policies for almost a century (Gazier, 2001). Its application varies among various time periods and national contexts (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). This concept, however, did not become part of higher education policy until the 1990s, most significantly in the UK (Yorke, 2006). It might be argued that graduates' employability is not a new concept for higher education, as it has been addressed by government policy documents. While it is true that graduates' employability as a conceptual goal has existed in higher education policies, the term was not used in the way it is currently used in some places in the world. Some governments, e.g. the UK and USA, have been using graduates' employability as an indicator to assess higher education institutions' performance. Harvey (2001) referred to this type of employability as "institutional employability". This is concerned with the number of graduates obtaining a job regardless of whether it was above or below their qualifications. Another indicator of institutional employability measures the period between graduation and obtaining a first job. The shorter the period that students have to wait before obtaining the first job, the higher rate of employability the educational institutions have (Harvey et al., 1997). Funds are then allocated among institutions according to their institutional employability.

It is worth noting that since their inception Saudi public institutions have not had the culture of keeping records of students' destinations. The role which graduates' employment destinations play in government funding decisions in a European country like the UK was not something considered in the KSA. Each Saudi public institution receives its budget allocation according to proposals submitted to the Ministry of Higher Education. The performance of a public institution thus has no effect on its allocated budget, which highlights the absence of an important motive for the institution to perform better. Private higher education institutions have, however, started to keep records of students' destinations, as this was among the requirements of the national academic accreditation. Nevertheless, those involved in keeping the records explained that they had better records of recent graduates than those of previous years. Still those records do not show the type of jobs which students held or how long they had to wait before gaining those first jobs—an important indicator which has been used in other countries for educational budgetary allocations.

Graduates' employability in this study is about graduates' "work-readiness" (Mason et al., 2003). More specifically, this study is concerned with higher education institutions' efforts in enhancing graduates' employability. The most commonly used definition of graduates' employability is that of Yorke (2006) which defines employability as:

A set of achievements, skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make the individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation(s), for the benefits of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy." (p. 6).

Little (2001) suggests differentiating between factors related to obtaining a job and those related to the preparation for a job. Yorke (2006) emphasises that employment should not be confused with employability, as the first is about gaining a job. A number of authors such as Hillage and Pollard (1998) and Knight and Yorke (2002) agree that graduates' employability is based on multiple factors. Hillage and Pollard suggest that graduates' employability depends on three things: (a) assets which encompass skills, knowledge, and attitudes of individuals, (b) the utilisation and deployment of those assets, and (c) the presentation of those assets. Knight and Yorke agree to some extent with Hillage and Pollard's components of employability, as to them employability is a "synergic combination of personal qualities, skills of various kinds and subject understanding" (p. 273). Brown and Williams (2003) criticise the work of Hillage and Pollard (1998) on employability, for not considering external factors that could affect graduates' employment, and this criticism can be applied to all the definitions above. Brown et al. (2003) find that Hillage and Pollard have omitted external market factors over which individuals have no control, such as "socio-cultural factors, e.g. gender, ethnicity" (Harvey, 2001). It is a fact that external factors have an effect on the prosperity of graduates. But it seems that there is still confusion regarding the difference between employment and employability.

Higher education institutions vary in the extent to which they are linked to the labour market. However, the literature suggests that private higher education institutions are being proactive in relation to it (Cao 2008). Levy (1986, 1992, 2003, 2006a) suggests that meeting market needs (which the public sector failed to do) is among the main reasons for the recent expansion in private higher education worldwide. Private institutions' linkage to the labour market is deemed to be important for the legitimacy of these types of institution (Kinser & Levy, 2006; Slantcheva, 2007; Levy, 2007). Private higher

education institutions, especially newly emergent ones, are observed to be distinct in their relation to the labour market (Levy, 1992, 2003, 2006a, 2009, 2011; Cao, 2008). This is found to be true even with private institutions which are perceived to be of lesser quality than public ones. Levy (2008, 2011) has even classified these private institutions to be “serious demand-absorbing” because of their orientation to the labour market.

Levy (1986a, 1992, 2003, 2006a), Cohen (2001), Pritchard (1992), Wolf and Castor (2001) and others have discussed characteristics and activities of private higher education institutions which have developed their relation to the labour market, and accordingly affect graduates’ employability. Among the characteristics discussed is that the courses offered by private institutions are mostly specialised and aimed more towards the job market (Levy, 1986a). This is seen, for example, in studies of Bangladesh (Alam et al., 2007), Georgia (Sharvashidze, 2005), Poland (Duczmal, 2005), and Africa (Verghese, 2004), countries in which private higher education offers courses which are purely linked to the job market. Career Services and networking are other employment-related activities observed in private higher education institutions (Levy, 1986a, 1992, 2003, 2006; Cao, 2008; Cohen, 2001; Pritchard, 1992; Wolf & Castor, 2001).

Cao’s (2008) study on private higher education thoroughly covers institutional efforts directly linked to the labour market. In her study, Cao investigates Chinese private institutions’ efforts to be linked to the labour market and the employment outcomes of these efforts. Her findings suggest that private higher education in China makes considerable efforts to enhance students’ employability and to link graduates with the labour market. Zhou (2003) and Monks (2000) and others find that graduates of private higher education have experienced better employment outcomes than did public higher education graduates.

While there is still a dearth of research on private institutions’ management efforts relating to graduates’ employability, the literature discussed above indicates that some private institutions do in fact seriously consider the problem. In this study, we explore the extent to which the Saudi private higher education sector is distinct in this regard, which sheds some interesting light on the situation in the public sector. While employment outcomes can hardly be accurately investigated in the newly expanding Saudi private sector, topics which were raised by my interviewees and that have relevance to the employability of the graduates are presented in this chapter. I shall also

discuss characteristics and practices of private institutions which are perceived to have an impact on graduates' employability. This will be followed by a discussion of employers' perceptions of graduates from public and private institutions.

A number of studies discuss the relation between higher education institutions and the labour market and distinguish between higher education practices which make those institutions relevant or linked to the labour market (Brennan, et al., 1996). Higher education practices that are observed to be relevant to the labour market and thus enhance graduates' employability include: curriculum, career services, training, and social events (Bennett et al., 1999). Scholars such as Yorke and Knight (2002) and others discussed models for higher education institutions which enhance graduates' employability. The model of Brennan et al. (1996), for example, includes five elements: (1) disciplinary content knowledge; (2) disciplinary skills; (3) workplace awareness; (4) workplace experience; and (5) generic skills. Disciplinary content knowledge is gained through courses provided within the institution's curriculum. Some studies explore the importance of field of study for graduates' initial employment (Walter, 2004). Discussions on curricula's relevance to the labour market focus on higher education offering subjects and equipping their students with skills needed in the labour market. Fields of study or graduates' specialisations could be the easiest way for employers to assess the graduate's knowledge about the field in which the graduate is applying to work. Academic knowledge and discipline-related skills, however, are found not to be sufficient for graduates' employability (Little, 2001; Knight & Yorke, 2002). Literature on graduates' employability emphasises "generic skills" which are also referred to as "transferable skills" or "key skills" (Harvey et al., 1997). The term 'generic skills' is defined by Bennett et al. (1999, p. 76) as "skills which can support study in any discipline, which can be potentially transferred to a range of contexts in higher education or the workplace". These include the skills of basic competence, communication, adaptability (i.e. problem-solving), creativity, personal development, effectiveness, and influencing (Bennett et al., 1999). While there are different lists of the kinds of generic skills employers are looking for, The Pedagogy for Employment Group (2004, p. 5) developed a list based on 25 years of research on the skills which employers expect to find in graduates.

As to the linkage between higher education and the labour market—when higher education assists in students' transition from education to the job market—Brennan et al. (1996) suggest that higher education can play a role in graduates' transition by guiding

students while they search for jobs, creating job opportunities for students through networking with the business sector, and dealing with intermediary agencies. The sections below present topics raised by stakeholders which have relevance to the efforts discussed above.

Relevance and Linkage to the Labour Market

Providers of private higher education without exception emphasised their institutions' superiority over the public sector with regard to graduates' employability. A vice dean of a private college remarked:

“I believe that parents who would like to give their children better employment opportunity should send them to private institutions.”

On the other hand, employers had conservative answers when initially asked about their preference in employing graduates from public or private higher education institutions. They claimed that they did not have any preference for students from public or private institutions, as they based their decisions on assessments and interviews, regardless of which kind of university the applicant came from. One employer commented:

“We do not have a preference. We look for talent regardless of where the student comes from. Talent has no identity. It is the individual who matters.”

The following section illustrates what made private providers think this way about themselves, to see if it is really true that employers have no preference for employing graduates from either public or private institutions.

The literature on graduates' employability suggests discipline and knowledge to be its core element (Johns, 2006) but hardly any of the employers interviewed commented on the kind of knowledge which university graduates possess. The only comment in relation to the subjects offered was from 20 percent of employers interviewed, who confirmed that there is still a deficiency in some specialisations like finance and accounting. Employers seemed flexible about students' majors and tended to agree that graduates often possess satisfactory subject knowledge. There was more emphasis, however, on skills and attitudes, which will be discussed later in the chapter. An employer from the private sector remarked:

“We are not so strict about the majors. For example, in our human resources and marketing departments, the majority are engineers.”

Another employer from the banking sector commented:

“In terms of knowledge, graduates generally have no problem. Graduates' knowledge is not a big issue for our organisation as we provide our applicant training.”

Faculty members from both sectors seemed to highlight generic and soft skills rather than specialisation and knowledge. A former dean of a private college who had previously worked in a public university remarked:

“For a student to be specialised in a certain subject does not mean that he is qualified for a job. Most graduates of the public sector lack the soft skills which are needed in the labour market.”

A faculty member who works in both sectors agreed:

“Graduates rarely end working in areas that are exactly related to their university degree. Thus, universities should insert ‘academic disciplines’ in their students and develop their way of thinking, which will give graduates the flexibility to work anywhere.”

The academic knowledge which higher education institutions provide no doubt is still important for students' employability. The utilisation of academic knowledge in the world of work is not equal, however, among disciplines (Teichler, 1994). Teichler suggests that the relation between academic knowledge and professional need is seen to be stronger and less conflicting in natural science subjects than in humanities and social sciences. Perhaps my interviewee's emphasis on soft skills would be less pronounced in more technical fields, but within the fields covered by the interviews, which concentrated on business-related fields. The kinds of soft skills which employers say they need will be discussed later in the chapter.

Practical Learning and Structured Work Experience

Practical learning is an area in which private institutions manifested their concerns for the career-development of their students. Practical learning, as it is discussed in this

section, refers to education which takes place through practical class assignments and hands-on projects. These require students to interact with people in their field of work and to apply the theoretical knowledge covered in class. Interestingly, almost all students interviewed from private higher education institutions perceived that knowledge delivered in public institutions is purely theoretical and has no practical application. They believed that the private system does not impart practical knowledge through its curriculum. This perception was also confirmed by students, graduates, and faculty in the public sector. A student from the private sector remarked:

“I have a friend who is taking the same marketing course as mine, but in the public university. I have two practical projects where I need to go out in the field to apply the knowledge I have been gaining. They do not have any assignments of a similar kind.”

This perception of a lack of practical learning in public institutions was among the reasons which a student gave for choosing to go to a private higher education institution:

“I applied to a private college because I wanted practical learning. Public institutions seem to only focus on delivering theoretical knowledge with less emphasis on the practical side.”

Another student from the private sector observed:

“We have cool and young instructors who are able to link theory to practice. I am really happy with the kind of knowledge I gained.”

Other students from the private sector agreed:

“Here we have ‘practice’ that helps us link with the real world.”

“Some courses require us to go to the field and apply to examine and understand the concept that we covered in class.”

The majority of students interviewed from the private sector explained how some courses consisted of practical assignments and projects. More than 70 % of students from the private sector who were interviewed praised the fact that they had practical assignments within their courses, but would like to see more. All students from the public sector complained about the theoretical nature of their courses, which confirms

the view of students from the private sector. A graduate student from the public sector said:

“Everything was theoretical. We were not exposed to any applications.”

A student from the public sector echoed this concern:

“We do not have practical exercises. Everything is rather theoretical.”

A student from the public sector commented:

“Private institutions have more practical elements than our institution [a public university]. Students there [in private institutions] have practical assignments all through their courses while internships are the only practical element in our programme.”

Faculty from the public sector did not deny this. A faculty member from the public sector confirmed the limitations of practical training:

“One of the major weaknesses that the public universities have is that their courses are more theoretical than practical.”

A faculty member from the public sector remarked:

“Very few faculty members here [in the public university] have practical assignments in their syllabus.”

Faculty members from the private sector seem to be more conscious of having practical assignments in their course. According to a faculty member:

“I put more grade emphasis on students’ projects and less on exams. Students learn and develop more skills through practical projects.”

Indeed these kinds of assignment develop practical knowledge and an early awareness in the students about the labour market and its needs. It is worth noting that unlike other countries, where private institutions differentiate themselves by offering technical and vocational degrees (Kruss & Kraak, 2003), private institutions in Saudi Arabia only offer university degrees, although they all seem to be with market-orientation.

Structured Work Experience

In addition to practical classroom projects and assignments, structured work experience is another avenue of practical learning particularly emphasised by those interviewed. This is commonly referred to as ‘internship’ or ‘co-op training’. The National Commission for Cooperative Education defines cooperative education as

“a structured educational strategy integrating classroom studies with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student’s academic or career goals”
(Groenewald, 2004, p. 17).

The advent of cooperative education programmes in countries like the USA and Canada was to meet the needs of industrial expansion in the twentieth century (Sovilla & Varty, 2004; McCallum & Wilson, 1988). In Europe too, the economic and technical restructuring of these countries required some initiatives from the EU member states to enhance young people’s employability and to facilitate the transition for graduates from school to work (Guile and Young, 2002; Stern & Wagner, 1999).

Internship programmes in the Saudi context involve students spending a certain period working in a business organisation in an area relevant to their specialisation before they graduate. Data suggest, however, that among higher education institutions (both public and private) the duration of training varies, the maximum being six months and the minimum being ninety hours. Trainee students usually have two supervisors: one academic instructor in the higher education institution, and the other from the workplace. Each student at the end of the training period needs to submit a report, setting out the assignments and responsibilities given to them by employers and an evaluation of their responses. In addition to the written report, some private institutions required students to provide an oral presentation to a panel for evaluation and feedback. Private institutions also received feedback or evaluation reports from employers on the performance of their students.

Co-op training is another element in which private higher education institutions of the KSA have taken the lead, providing this before the public sector. For example, when I graduated from the public university in Jeddah in 2000, internship training was neither part of the ‘co-op training’, nor part of its curriculum. For example, students of the Faculty of Economics and Administration used to submit a research project which did not have any practical elements. The absence of the co-op training from public

universities' curriculum in Saudi Arabia was a serious issue which was raised and discussed by authors such as Al-Hammad (2000,2001a), Al-Sultan (2000) and Bukhari (2001). The first Saudi symposium on co-op training was held in 2001 by a public university. The symposium's intention was to conduct a discussion on its importance, and its needs while benefiting from other countries' experiences (Al-Hammad, 2001b). Indeed, in Saudi Arabia, co-op training should be of high value, especially with the limited opportunities for the students to interact with the real world before they graduate; there is also no culture of voluntary work in which students could experience the world of work before they became real employees. In addition, because families support and sponsor their children until their late ages, the majority of students did not need to work before they graduate.

The literature discusses the benefits of co-op training not only for students, but also employers and higher education institutions themselves. Weisz and Chapman (2004) found that this co-op training enhanced institutions' relationships with industry and positively impacted staff and curriculum developments. The positive impact which this programme has for students was discussed by Gardner et al. (1992), Riggio et al. (1994) and Dressler and Keeling (2004), who summarised the benefits which students gained from it, and among these are:

“Increased disciplined thinking; improved learning: taking responsibility for learning, learn how to learn; improved problem-solving: analytical thinking; improved performance in the classroom, increased GPA; increased commitment to educational goals; increased ability to finance their education” (Dressler & Keeling, 2004, p. 225). Guile and Griffiths argue that work experience provides:

“An opportunity for those young people in full-time education and training to develop their understanding about changes in the ‘world of work’, to enhance their key skills and to make closer links between their formal programmes of study and the world of work” (2001, p. 115).

Among employers interviewed in the study, some found that the co-op programme gave them the opportunity to get some new ideas from a young workforce, which echoes the findings of Hurd and Hendy (1997) and Reeve (2001), on the benefits employers gain from co-op training. While the benefit which stakeholders gain from internship programmes is not part of this study design, all interviewees seemed aware of its role in serving as a pathway to employment, although there were also some complaints.

Screening for new hires was considered by half of the employers interviewed and was also among the benefits discussed by Braunstein and Loken (2004) and Metzger (2004). Indeed, this should be beneficial to employers, especially with the difficulty they face in dismissing Saudi nationals. According to an employer from an international organisation:

“One of the reasons that we thought about establishing an internship programme was that we previously had difficulty dismissing Saudis when we found them unqualified. We now can assess graduates through this internship program, and then we either hire them or ask them to leave.”

While supervised training is highly valued and to some extent attracted students to applying to private institutions, there are still some problems which were identified by both students and faculty members. Some students and faculty members perceived employers as not always being cooperative, especially in relation to the kinds of project they assigned to students who were doing the internship training. According to a faculty member from the private sector, some employers seem to not have trust in students and thus refrain from sharing information with them. She went on to say:

“The attitude of some employers is a wonder to me. They do not assign students to serious tasks. They refuse to share or disclose information. They do not seem to realise that they are receiving consultation from us for free, as faculty are also supervising the students.”

On the same issue one student commented:

“Some employers don't understand that we are here to learn and to make sense of what we're learning from books at college. So instead of enhancing our understanding, they ask us to do secretarial work like photocopying and answering telephones. This does not serve the aims we are here for.”

Another student from the private sector remarked:

“It was not effective co-op training. I was mainly just observing; data was confidential. I did not receive enough support from my supervisor.”

A student elaborated this point:

“To be honest, we do not have a culture that respects or trains trainees. They do not have time to train them. They undermine trainees, and don't provide

appropriate training. I did dirty job tasks: answering the phones, receiving customers. I participated in some focus group sessions. I learned a few things, but it made me feel that it is not the thing that I want to do.”

On the other hand, half of the employers interviewed put the responsibility on higher education institutions for the effectiveness of students’ co-op training. The majority blamed those institutions for not being clear about the kind of training they wanted their students to receive. One employer observed:

“Private institutions send us students without any clarification of the kind of areas they want us to train them in. Higher education institutions, including private ones, have a problem with internship programmes. They need to take them more seriously. Career centres, for example, should be following up on students and their performance.”

Another suggestion from an employer was to extend the training period as it would make it cost-effective for the employer to invest in the trainee. Employers were seen to take trainees more seriously when the required duration of the training period was longer. More specifically, trainees who were required to work for six months were given more serious work, i.e. non-administrative in nature, than those who were requested to work for ninety hours. If one compared the knowledge and experience gained by students at university A, a public institution, who were required to complete ninety hours of training, and students at College A, a private institution, who were required to complete three months of training, it would be apparent that students at the private institution had benefited much more.

An employer commented on the duration of the internship:

“The co-op training is still very short to equip and orient the student, to rely on them. I think it should not be less than six months, which is the case at KFUPM. For the company to even trust in and give responsibilities, internships should not be less than three months.”

While the majority of students from the private sector commented on the quality of the internships, participants from the public sector expressed greater difficulty in finding workplaces to do their internship in. This is not to say that it is not an issue for the private sector, but it is considerably less of one. A student from the private sector explained:

“I have been searching for three months for a place to do my co-op training. I went to a number of organisations, public and private. They took my applications but then I never heard back from them.”

A faculty member from the public sector remarked:

“We now [in the public sector] have internship as part of our curriculum, but the problem is that it is not easy for students to find places of employment to perform their internship in.”

Participants from the private sector echoed this concern. A staff member from the private sector commented:

“We still have a very weak database of companies. I don't think it's only our institution. I believe it's an issue with all higher education institutions. When we try to find internships for students, companies don't have the system. They either don't have a section for females, or any training system.”

The same concern about training women was emphasised by another faculty member from the private sector:

“Only international companies have training programmes. However, not all have sections.”

Already it is evident that the private sector's efforts to improve the skills of students for employability are determined to some extent by the readiness of the labour market. This is even more pronounced in the case of women. As we have mentioned earlier in the chapter, students—especially female ones—faced difficulties finding places for training, as gender segregation is mandatory in the workplace. Not all companies in the KSA are ready to take students. The culture of internships or co-op training is still new to the higher education system and to the labour market in the KSA, as internship or co-op training had not been part of the curriculum in public universities, as is now the case. The importance of it is clear but more collaboration is still needed between higher education and the market. The benefits to both should be apparent. Employers should take this kind of training more seriously. Apostolides and Looye (1997) suggest quality supervision, a sense of contribution to projects, and challenging assignments to be key factors for successful co-op training.

Career Centre and Students' Connections

In the section above we have seen the scarcity of places available in the labour market where students can obtain their co-op training. The situation, however, seems to be less serious for students at private institutions. It was found that students in private institutions are privileged with some services available at their institutions. Students of the private sector could search for a place for this kind of training through their institution's career centre. This is an employment-related service offered almost exclusively by private institutions. Career centres offer help with CV-writing and interview tips, in addition to planning and organising career days. The main function of the centre, in all private institutions visited, was to coordinate between employers and senior and graduate students to facilitate internships and employment. Each private institution developed its own database of organisations and companies at which students could do their internships. The career centre continues to serve the students even after they graduate. The career centre remains the bridge between employers who are looking for qualified people to employ, and graduates who are looking for jobs. Career centres' services were highly valued by many as they remarked:

“I think [the added value in private higher education] is the career centre, which sends students' CVs to major companies. I think this is only in private institutions.”

“I think the presence of the career centre in the college is very important; it really helped me a lot in sending my CV to more than one company.”

On the other hand, students interviewed from the public sector confirmed that nothing similar exists in it yet. A senior student at a public university explained:

“Students here [in the public sector] search for places to do their internships. The university has nothing to do with it.”

Another student commented:

“We don't have a career centre here; I even had to go to a private institution's career day to try to find a job.”

According to career centre representatives, communication with organisations happens in both ways—sometimes organisations call them, looking for students to hire or vice versa. This is absolutely not the case in the public sector. When university A was first

visited for the purpose of this research in 2008, there was then no properly developed career centre in the Faculty of Administration and Economics. At that time there was only one career centre for the whole of the university, and it was only responsible for employing students within the university. An employer commented:

“We communicate with higher education institutions through career centres, which are more active in private institutions than public ones. Public institutions do not even have emails; they still use faxes, which is a good example that we do not use the same language.”

A respondent from a recruiting agency commented:

“It is easier for us to supply organisations with graduates of private institutions; the bureaucracy in the public sector is hindering.”

It is worth noting that although employers professed not to have a preference in hiring students from public or private institutions, they did find private institutions to be easier to contact. Perhaps the small size of a private college made it easier for employers to get hold of career centres. Fifty percent of the employers I have interviewed commented that they do not know whom to contact in public universities. They confessed that private institutions were more active in involving private businesses in their activities. ‘Career Day’ was the most recognisable link between institutions and business organisations.

Although public institutions did organise career days for their students, none of the employers interviewed appeared to be aware of them. It is possible that lack of promotion by public universities was the reason, or because perhaps the negative perception which employers had of public institutions diminished their enthusiasm for those events. Indeed, career day and extracurricular activities, discussed in the previous chapter, allow students to develop networks to rely on while searching for training or jobs. While the career centre is available and active at private institutions, some graduate interviewees explained that they had relied on their own connections to find places for their internship. According to a student from the private sector:

“I had my co-op training at the company of my father’s friend.”

Two students from the private sector remarked:

“I did my internship at my friend’s father’s or uncle’s company.”

“Most students [in a private sector institution] belong to families that have their own business.”

One should not underestimate the benefit of ‘connections’ which are comparatively stronger in private institutions, considering the background of students who come mostly from middle to high social classes. This was also observed during my visit to a founder of a private college and a dean of another private institution, who proudly named their graduates who were now holding high positions in different organisations. The list was not a long one, and what was interesting was the fact that they all came from well-known families and of relatively high social class. This, in itself, makes one wonder whether private higher education institutions really did provide better education for their students. Had those institutions allowed them to prosper in the labour market or had they found places where students of high to middle social classes clustered, and then made use of social connectivity and networking to prosper further.

Chrisholm (1999) argues that due to the oversupply of qualified graduates, employers vigorously look for generic skills which are less related to formal credentials. Walter (2004, p. 538) claims that with the rapid technological change, it is somewhat dangerous to concentrate on excessively specific technical skills. During my interviews, most employers indicated their emphasis on the soft skills, which is consistent with the literature on graduates’ employability, as discussed earlier, which stresses the importance of generic skills, also discussed earlier in the chapter.

Communication skills were another important ability for employers, and they praised the personality of private institutions’ graduates. Employers found graduates from private institutions to have better personalities and communication skills than those from the public sector. One employer remarked:

“I cannot generalise, as I do not have statistics available on the situation of all graduates, but I can say that graduates of private institutions look more impressive and more confident when they come for interviews.”

Another employer echoed the same opinion and added an interesting observation:

“Apparently graduates of private institutions have better skills even in searching for jobs. While they use the internet to search for vacancies and to communicate with us via emails, graduates of public institutions still use phones.”

Interviewees had different opinions of the factors which are leading students of private institutions to be more impressive for employers. While a female faculty member agreed that English should not be given extra importance, she perceived students' competence in English to have positive impact on their personalities:

“I am not trying to degrade the importance and the value of the English language. But I want to highlight other things. English is not exactly what employers want. What actually matters is the candidate's personality. I believe to some extent that graduates' competence in English tends to influence their personalities.”

Graduates' proficiency in the English language could indeed have a positive impact on their personalities, as it gives an individual the chance to be more exposed to the external world. Obviously, however, English is not the only difference between public and private institutions which would cause the difference in personalities among graduates of both sectors. For example, the majority of the respondents who talked about developing students' skills tended to come from a private institution. A vice dean of a private college remarked:

“We are aware that Saudis feel fulfilled only when they have the title of ‘manager’. So we try here to round out their personalities and equip them with leadership skills, so that at least they will be worthy of holding this position.”

Administrators from other private institutions echoed the same view:

“Our graduates are better prepared than others: they have the language, they have the computer skills. We have invested a lot in them through workshops. In the college, we focus on building students' character.”

“Interpersonal skills are the second type of skills we are concerned about here in the private college. We arrange activities for students, inside and outside the college, to help them develop such skills. I don't think students go through such activities without developing some skills.”

Many interviewed students and graduates of private institutions admitted that private institutions helped them develop their personalities. The graduates explained that in-class and extracurricular activities—discussed above—helped a great deal in developing those skills. In private institutions, a student's presentation was an important activity required by most instructors. Their involvement in student union elections helped in

developing their communication and negotiating skills as well as their confidence. In relation to this, an employer commented:

“Graduates of private institutions are more open, because of the nature of private institutions.”

Furthermore, ‘teamwork’ was another skill which students and graduates of private institutions deemed important and praised their colleges for training them in it. It was a skill which none of the employers considered to be a stand-alone factor but might have considered it to be a communication skill. Finding students and graduates who placed such high emphasis on its importance was surprising. Those of private institutions were full of praise for their instructors who assigned to them ‘group projects’ and required them to work collectively.

Unlike students in private institutions, most student and graduate interviewees from the public sector complained that such activity was rarely required of them; only a few instructors asked them to do it. A student from the public sector complained:

“The university covers communication skills as a training course.”

An administrator of a public institution admitted:

“What students really lack is skills. We here [in a public university] teach them pure academic knowledge. Though the preparatory year covers some skills, these are offered to students as degree requirement ... Such skills need to be imbedded within the programme.”

While employers observed differences in some skills between graduates of public and private institutions—being superior in the latter—professionalism was a common problem among graduates from both sectors, as will be discussed in the following section.

The Professionalism of the Graduates

Some employers still harboured reservations about hiring Saudis, regardless of their background, due to employees' attitudes, which is consistent with attitude issues raised and discussed by Al-Turkustani (1998) and Ramadi (2005) regarding reasons for the high unemployment levels among Saudi nationals. The attitude of Saudi employees has been the most serious issue facing employers. A major concern for most employers was the lack of loyalty in newly hired graduates. One of my interviewees commented:

“Saudi employees are hard to retain. They tend to move between private organisations following any slight increase in salaries.”

Other employers complained about graduates' lack of motivation at work:

“You do not find the locals to have this willingness to work. Even when they work, there is this superior feeling among themselves as locals and they therefore feel they should have special privileges. They are looking at it from their own perspectives.”

An academic from the private sector confirmed:

“Graduates of other universities [not local ones] are learning the same subjects. However, they are more successful. The only difference is that they have different attitudes towards work and learning. They have the desire to learn and to continuously update their skills.”

Most of the students interviewed, however, did not show much concern about their first post. Instead, the majority displayed willingness to gain some experiences at the beginning. Other employers commented on another attitude problem which he found common among Saudi job applicants:

“Fresh graduates applying for a job seem to have the same attitude; they all want to hold managerial posts right from the start. Many times I accept their requests, and then give them more responsibilities, but very few stay after that.”

“The frequent comment among recruiters is that most Saudis think, ‘As long as I am a Saudi, I can do what I like! I am secure, it is not mandatory for me to implement the rules.’

Graduates' over-concern for the level of salary is a serious issue that was highly criticised by employers. An employer commented on his experience with students on career days he attended:

“The first question students ask when they come to our booth is, ‘How much do you pay?’ None of the students seem to have any concern about their career development. I think this is a serious issue that higher education institutions need to address. They need to orient their students.”

Indeed, minimum salary levels were a concern for both graduate and career centre representatives from the private sector. Some interviewees expressed the view that paying for education in private higher education institutions meant that graduates required higher-paid jobs. Perhaps this could present a serious element which further complicates the issue of unemployment among private university graduates, as the majority of them had paid for their education and would have liked to have seen a return on that investment. A career staff member from a private institution commented:

“Our office receives a lot of requests from small- to medium-sized employers offering salaries that are very low. Graduates can hardly accept such offers, as they do not find them worth the investment in their education, and refuse the offers.”

Another career centre staff member from another private institution explained:

“When companies contacted me, I asked them about the kind of positions and salaries because I know our students have certain expectations.”

A student from the private sector confirmed:

“I do not care about my position, but I am keen to receive salary that matches what I had spent for my studies.”

Another issue raised by more than half of the employers was not surprising in the context of Saudi culture. That was the issue of punctuality. It was an issue which I have experienced while conducting this research, and with all types of stakeholders, including the very employers who complained about regarding others. For example, I arranged interview appointments with three students, but they did not show up for the meeting and offered no explanation or word of apology—they simply disappeared. This was a serious complaint by employers, and more than a few had experienced it with graduates who came for job interviews.

While graduates of private institutions, for the previously discussed skills and connections, achieved better employment opportunities than graduates of the public sector, they still had competitors. Students in private institutions believed that those who study abroad on scholarships were a threat to their eventual chances of employment. Senior students from the private sector perceived such graduates as a threat:

“The competition is really high in the labour market from students who received their degree abroad.”

“The labour market is obsessed with foreign degrees. Regardless of the name of the Western university, they prefer them to local ones.”

That worry was not a misplaced one, since employers did show a preference for graduates who received their education abroad. These employers did not emphasise the perceived superior knowledge of students who had studied abroad, but were impressed by their overall personality and attitude. An employer who prefers to hire Saudis with foreign degrees remarked:

“Students receiving their education from abroad tend to be more creative, committed, independent, and have better communication skills.”

Several years ago, only a few people went abroad to study on scholarships or at their own expense. One might wonder what the situation will be when the over-80,000 students sent to other countries on scholarship return home in the near future. Indeed, the large number of graduates who are sent to foreign universities become a source of outside competition for graduates from both private and public sector institutions. Nevertheless, graduates of local universities might be less worried if they knew that there were some employers who were critical of graduates of international universities. An employer commented:

“It depends on the university; not all universities are the same. I interviewed some of those who studied abroad and I doubted that they had left the country. Their English competence and the way they think was shocking. I guess it was more a vacation from their country and family than an educational trip.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at the relationship between private higher education and the labour market. In general, employers have a positive view, with few criticisms, regarding the employability of private institutions' graduates—compared to those of the public sector. Very few employers had a high opinion of graduates from public institutions, other than the KFUPM, which was perceived to be very successful in producing capable graduates. Employers, however, viewed all graduates critically in terms of maturity, attitude, and readiness to work.

Therefore, the relationship between Saudi private higher education and the labour market is consistent with the observations of authors such as Levy (1986a, 2003, 2006a), and Cao (2008). The failure of the public sector to meet the market needs can explain the need for its re-emergence in higher education by playing the important role of improving the employability of the graduates. Findings suggest that the private sector of higher education has the characteristics of being 'better' in that role than the public sector, responding to the labour market's needs.

It is clear that private institutions are putting effort into the employability of their graduates, but there are problems within the labour market itself. The labour market, for example, is perceived as being not yet ready to properly train internees. Students—particularly women—have trouble finding workplaces to perform internships, which might actually make their efforts useless. While many external factors affect graduates' employment, private institutions' efforts to enhance the employability of their graduates and the high socio-economic status of private institutions' students might increase their chances of employment.

Beyond English fluency, employers viewed graduates critically in terms of maturity, attitude, readiness to work. Employers considered teamwork as a vital skill which private sector students perceived they had learned as part of group class projects.

Two key features of private higher education were perceived as beneficial by students and employers: practical class assignments (which require interaction with people in the student's field of work) and internships (which require work in a company for up to six months before graduation). Internships are seen as pathways to employment. But there have been problems with implementing these structured work experiences. Employers

feel the institutions are not clear about what they want. Students find the training to be inadequate but employers are wary of investing time if the internship period is too short--90 days rather than six months. In general, the labour market is perceived as being not ready to properly train internees. Students, particularly women, have trouble finding workplaces to perform their internships. But career centres in the private sector have developed databases which help link employers with students. Those centres also help students to prepare for the job market.

Summary for Part III

In this part of the thesis, I looked into private higher education in Saudi Arabia from the institutional perspective. With this in mind, I divide my discussion into three chapters, corresponding to the three phases of higher education: Entry, Experience, and Exit. I covered wide ranges of issues under these three phases, including admission policies, subject choices, teaching and learning practices, assessment, extracurricular activities, employment preparation etc. I made use of the empirical data from my fieldwork, in order to present my readers with a sketch of perceptions of private higher education among different groups of stakeholders in the Saudi context. With regard to the Entry phase, as we have seen earlier in Chapter 4, the public sector is falling short of absorbing secondary school graduates. Data from this chapter, however, suggest that there are also demands for 'different' and 'better' education, to which the public sector is also failing to respond.

The atmosphere of the public sector is not taken to be prestigious for some. Private higher education, because of its perceived distinct requirements for admission, addresses other failures of the public sector. As we have seen, some respondents saw a difference in social class between students in private and public institutions. For them, it was clear that private higher education was an enclave of wealthier upper-class students, a fact which they perceived to be desirable. The open access to the public sector, being free for all, is understood to affect the prestige of the public institution, in which students from all social classes can enrol.

The public sector, because of its limited capacity and competitive admission, constrains many applicants, who do not necessarily have low academic achievements, the opportunities to pursue their higher education. While equity and quality might be a concern because of the private sector's admission requirements, the existence of government scholarships for private higher education has removed or at least lessened the financial barrier to access. Based on respondents' comments, this appears to be altering the perception that private institutions are enclaves for the social elite or for lower achievers. Those interviewed identified several ways in which private higher education offered increased opportunities to marginalised groups. This was particularly visible in the case of non-Saudis, who had very limited access to higher education prior to the advent of the private sector. Private higher education institutions in the KSA

have helped to overcome a major problem which expatriates used to face when their children reached university level. These institutions have also provided greater access for students with lower GPAs who could not gain entry to the public universities. Many of those students are proving to be academic achievers. Through flexible admission and tuition fees, the private sector is responding to students' demand for 'more' and 'better' higher education. While these admission criteria have led people to take a negative view of the private sector—that it is a place for the wealthy or the lower achiever—such negative views have changed with the introduction of government scholarship.

With regard to the Experience phase, there was an overall perception among students, faculty, and graduates that the education being received by students in private institutions was superior, at least in some aspects, to what is being received by students at public institutions. Understandings of public and private higher education institutions suggest the possible motives behind the establishment of private higher education. Low quality of instruction, minimum attention to students' developments of skill, and access to all are seen to be missing in the public sector. Several different factors contributed to this perception.

Another important issue related to the Experience phase is class size, which was understood to produce a higher quality of instruction in the private sector. Many, although not all students, felt that they benefited from the increased level of personal attention which they received in private institutions. This perception was reflected by students and faculty of public institutions, who also believed that students in private institutions received more direct attention from faculty.

The private sector was also noted to be distinct for its extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities and in-class activities resulted from the small class size in the private sector and are apparently developing students' skills and personality. This being limited in the public sector suggests its failure to enhance and develop its students' skills .

Opinions were divided on the question of assessment methods. Although some respondents were harshly critical of teaching in public institutions and praised the more practical teaching methods found in the private sector, others pointed out that the same flaws might also be present there. The strong consensus found among respondents

regarding class size and the use of English was absent when they were asked about teaching methods.

Finally, this suggests the motives for private higher education to respond to the demand for 'better' and 'different' qualities of teaching and learning and a need for 'more' opportunities of higher education.

With regard to the Exit phase, while it is early to have a firm and accurate opinion about a sector which is young and small in size, private institutions in Saudi Arabia are found to bear more relevance to the market. For example, programmes offered by private institutions are market-oriented. Private institutions took the lead in offering new majors, especially for women, which should eventually give them wider opportunities in the labour market, which is still male dominated. Offering programmes in English is another significant feature of private institutions which is relevant to the labour market. As in so many other areas which this study has explored, employers found English fluency to be quite significant, in fact the most important job skill. Employers also emphasise the importance of communication skills and self-confidence. Private institutions are addressing those skills through assigning students work-related projects, the internship programme, and through involving students in social activities. Career centres in private institutions provide services which are deemed to be important for both students and employers.

In general, employers have a positive view, with few criticisms, regarding the employability of private institutions' graduates—compared to those from the public sector. Very few employers had a high opinion of graduates from public institutions, other than the KFUPM, which was perceived to be very successful in producing capable graduates. Employers, however, viewed all graduates critically in terms of maturity, loyalty attitude, and readiness to work.

Therefore, the relationship between Saudi private higher education and the labour market is consistent with the observations of authors such as Levy (1986a, 2003, 2006a), and Cao (2008). The failure of the public sector to meet market needs can explain the need for the private sector's emergence in higher education to play an important role in improving the employability of graduates. Findings suggest that private higher education has the characteristics of being 'better' in that role than the public sector, responding to the labour market's needs.

It is clear that private institutions are putting effort into the employability of their graduates, but there are problems within the labour market itself. The labour market, for example, is perceived as being not yet ready to properly train internees. Students—particularly women—have trouble finding workplaces to perform internships, which might actually make their efforts useless. While many external factors would affect graduates' employment, private institutions' efforts to enhance the employability of their graduates and the high socio-economic status of private institutions' students might increase their chances of employment.

In the final Part of this thesis, I will explore the role of private higher education from a socio-political perspective. To this end, I look into the use of English language in the private sector, also one of its distinctive features. I also explore the changing relationship between the private sector and the Saudi government.

PART IV

A BIGGER PICTURE

This part examines private higher education from a wider perspective. It first looks at the role of the English language in private higher education and its implication from a socio-cultural angle. The second dimension of this part explores the relationship between private higher education and the Government.

The section on the use of English language in the private sector looks at its implications in relation to the three phases of higher education: Entry, Experience, and Exit—how students choose between the two sectors (public or private), how teaching, learning, and other academic activities are conducted, and how employers evaluate their graduate applicants. Challenges facing private higher education because of their use of the English language will also be covered.

The section on the Government will discuss the evolving relationship between the State and the private sector of higher education—the Government’s stance changing from denial to reluctance, to experimental, and to partial support. This is intended as a way of understanding the Government’s role in the rise and the development of the private sector of higher education.

Chapter 9

English as a Medium of Instruction

The focus of this chapter is on the use of English language in the private sector. Overall, English as the language of instruction is seen as a distinctive feature of the private sector. By making English their language of instruction, newly established private higher education institutions have a competitive advantage over public providers. The difference in the language of instruction, therefore, remains one of the major differences between public and private higher education institutions. The majority of interviewees viewed English-language instruction as a positive feature of private higher education.

However, the use of English is more than a mere choice of instruction language. It also bears certain symbolic meanings in terms of the interaction between Saudi Arabia and the global economy. For many Saudis who are involved in, or aspire to be involved in, a globalised market, mastery of the English language has become of crucial importance. It is noteworthy that all stakeholders interviewed showed their concerns about the role of the English language in higher education provision. I did not include any specific questions relating to the language of instruction at first, but as my fieldwork went on, I noticed that almost all interviewees raised the topic in their answers to a variety of questions. I included this topic in later interviews.

English and the Regional Context

In the interviews, students, faculty, administrators, and employers all considered the use of the English language an important feature of private higher education. Arabic is the medium of instruction at all educational levels, including higher education, with the exception of the King Fahad University for Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM), a public university, originally set up by ARAMCO, the American Oil company operating in the country. The other exceptions are colleges of natural and applied sciences in public institutions.

The issue of using English as the language of instruction is important, given the fact that private higher education institutions in the KSA are not branches of international universities. In other words, the use of the English language is not a requirement of a foreign provider, but a choice of domestic providers - a clear strategy, in other words. In past decades, we have seen that English-speaking countries like the UK, USA, and Australia have been establishing branches of their universities around the world, teaching their home curricula to students in the host country. This is the case in the UAE where foreign providers are allowed to establish their branches, but it is not the case in the KSA where foreign ownership is still not allowed in private higher education provision.

The significance of this issue can be better understood in the light of the regional educational traditions in the KSA. Seeing itself as the centre of the Muslim world and being the birthplace of Islam where the religion's most sacred shrines are situated, the KSA attaches special significance to the Arabic language—the language of Islam's holy book, the Qur'an, and the Prophet's teachings, the Hadeeth. The Arabic language, therefore, has a semi-sacred status in the Muslim community, and in particular in the KSA, as a result of the total dominance of the Islamic faith in all aspects of life in the KSA. This largely explains the fact that neither English nor any other foreign languages play a role in the public educational systems of the KSA.

The issue of foreign language is further complicated by the regional history. Although Saudi Arabia has never been colonised by a Western country, Saudi society shares a fear of loss of cultural identity and language like other neighbouring states in the recent past, and hence sees of the use of the English language as a threat to their own culture (Kirkpatrick, 2011). According to a faculty member from a private college:

“Attempts to deviate from this norm (of teaching in Arabic) used to be met with the strong objections fostered by the views of the politico-religious status quo.”

A former dean of a private college added:

“There was always this fear that educating people in English would expose them to harmful knowledge and would introduce ideas contrary to their religion and the values of the country.”

This fear of Western influence by religious authorities seems to be reflected in the claims of some scholars. For example, Karmani (2005) describes an oppositional

relation between English and Islam in his statement, “More English, less Islam” - in other words, a spread of the English language means a fall of the religion. However, Karmani’s view does not go unchallenged. For instance, Elyas (2005, p. 39) argues that

“English in the KSA does not pose any danger to eroding the identity of its locals, but on the other hand, it can serve as a tool for modernisation and a jet for a brighter new future for KSA” .

The opposition of the use of English language in education also stems from an influential perception of the wave of globalization - although the country did not experience the political colonialism of the last century, the KSA has not escaped the 21st century’s colonialism—globalisation and its effective tool, the English language. As James Crystal (2003) reveals in his book *English as a Global Language*, 85% of international organisations use English as the official medium of communication, and 85% of the world film market is in English. English is now the language of science, medicine, and technology. More than 80% of scientific papers are first published in English (Crystal, 2003). The globalisation of the world economy and the advance of information technology has been expedited by the use of the one language: English. As David Graddol has remarked: “English is at the centre of many globalization mechanisms” (Graddol, 1997, p. 45). He also points out that “one of the most significant educational trends world-wide is the teaching of a growing number of courses in universities through the medium of English.” This accounts for a noticeable increase in the number of non-native speakers of English who are studying their course subjects in English (Colman, 2006; Evans & Green, 2007). Whether English is a result of globalisation or is one of globalisation’s mechanisms (Graddol, 1997), the “Englishisation” of higher education is understood to have played an important role in the spread of the English language (Brumfit, 2004; Graddol, 1997).

Political and economic pressures have been more substantial in the fight against the spread of the English language in the KSA’s education system. Elyas (2008) argues that the events of 9/11 caused the USA government to put pressure on the Saudi Government for educational reform. However, reform has only taken place recently. Al-Essa, (2010) suggests that this revision of the curriculum would not have happened without pressure from the West. The perception in the West centred on the fundamentalist approach to religious education in schools which, they argued, helped to foster extremism (Al-Essa,2010). They associated extremists’ attitudes with their lack of understanding of ‘the others’ as well as their poor mastery of the English language.

Aware of the importance of the English language and also the pressure from the USA, the Saudi government has recently undertaken reforms in its education systems with new policies. Since 2006, the English language has started to become part of primary education - before that, students in the public sector started to learn English only in secondary school. Also, new regulations were introduced which mandate that students start learning English in Grade 6 rather than in Grade 7. In 2011, a decision was made by the Ministry of Education to require English education starting from Grade 4 (Saudi Gazette, 2011).

Another example of this is the Government's changed position on international schools which teach in English to cater to expatriates' children. Before 2009, no Saudi citizen was allowed to join those schools without the written permission from the Ministry of Education. This permission was granted only in exceptional cases, mostly to children of government officials who were serving or had served in Saudi embassies. International schools were 'transitional stations' for those students to re-acclimatise. Those students can stay at an international school for no more than three years, after which they must enrol in the Saudi educational system. In 2009, a decree was issued permitting Saudi nationals to be enrolled in international schools.

The Entry Phase : Students' Choice and Access

For the administrators and faculty members in the private sector, the use of English in instruction is not only helping the Government to respond to the global political pressures coming from the West, but also addressing some of the stakeholders' needs. The distinctiveness of the English language in private higher education institutions was seen through students' discussion about their choice of institutions, quality of educational materials, graduates' employability, and faculty recruitment.

However, when it comes to students' perceptions in this regard, the situation is a bit more complicated. For some, English language does seem to be a factor which students consider when choosing among higher education institutions. A student from the private sector, for instance, commented:

“I wanted to go to an English-speaking university, as English nowadays is the international language, and it is important to know the English terminology. Later, when you work, you will be lost if you don’t have the language.”

Also for other students, fluency in English would be helpful for their graduate studies abroad. This is a major attraction for students, especially with the availability of King Abdullah External Scholarships which cover all their costs. A student from the private sector said:

“I wanted to do my Baccalaureate degree in English because I am planning to go abroad for my Masters.”

For others, the English language can mean either a tremendous effort input, or a challenge (or threat) to the local culture. Some students found English learning rather demanding, and appeared reluctant to make extra efforts and preferred the traditional Arabic instruction. When female public university students were asked why they did not choose private higher education, some of them replied:

“I want to relax, and to study in Arabic will be of less pressure on me.”

“I had fears of having to learn everything in English, although I learned a bit in school. It was easier for me to learn things in Arabic.”

A faculty member from the public sector also confirmed a high student demand for Arabic instruction:

“Here in the public university most of our science subjects are offered in English as well, but we are requested by students to instruct in Arabic.”

A student from the public sector explained:

“English is very important, but we blame the general education system for failing to equip us with this skill.”

In addition, there are those who have negative views on English instruction due to their socio-religious beliefs. Some students in the public sector criticised the use of English in the private sector. Some students from the public sector asserted:

“We should be proud of our own language.”

“But we still do not want everything to be in English as still we are Arab.”

Despite the tensions with cultural and religious traditions over the use of English language in higher education, students in private as well as public higher education institutions alike showed their awareness of the importance of English in the labour market. The relevance of the English language to the labour market and graduates' employability will be discussed further in the following chapter.

It is worth noting that there are, indeed, some who are against the use of English language in higher education. A recent article by Asharq Alawsat (2004) was based on a research calling for the 'Arabising' of subjects like medicine and science in the public sector, which at the moment uses Western textbooks. In addition to cultural-religious factors discussed above, researchers found that students are having great difficulties in using Western textbooks and this is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. Students' limited competence in English is found to be affecting their comprehension of the subject matter and hence their academic achievement. As we shall see in the following section, it is, in fact, an issue which was raised by some academic staff from the private sector as well.

Private institutions assess students' competence in the English language before admitting them to any academic programmes. They use exams such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) to classify entrants. Students are either qualified to start an academic programme or requested to undertake a preparation year to improve their English language and other academic skills. This admission requirement is another possible factor which makes students refrain from studying their higher education degree in English or might make them unqualified to pursue a degree in the private sector.

It is worth noting that in 2008 a public university in the city of Jeddah established a separate institute to enhance student's competence in English. At this centre, students take four levels of intensive English as part of their preparatory year. These four levels must be taken by all students, regardless of their subjects of study. Previously, students in subjects other than natural sciences, applied science, and English literature, took only two levels of basic English. Some in the public sector are suspicious about the actual effects of this programme on its targeted students. According to a staff member at the public university:

“this programme is only ‘window dressing’ by the university. A number of staff use Arabic when teaching in this programme. The programme is being run on a quarter basis, which is considered to be insufficient for students to grasp new concepts.”

A student from the public sector confirmed:

“We do have English courses but they are very poorly organised.”

The Experience Phase: Teaching and Learning

Scholars like Coleman (2006) and Graddol (1997) have discussed the benefits gained from using English as a medium of instruction. Coleman (2006), for example, suggests several reasons which motivate higher education institutions and governments to move towards making English the medium of instruction, which are:

“Content and language integrated learning (CLIL), internationalisation, student exchange, teaching and research materials, staff mobility, and the marker in international students”.

Among the payoffs of using English, discussed by Graddol (1997), was also the availability of up-to-date textbooks and the accessibility it provided to research materials and journal articles. While Chung (2006) argues that there are no comprehensive studies of the effectiveness of using English as a medium for instruction and that its impact on learning is not clear, a number of studies agree that the most observed benefit of using English as a medium of instruction is simply that this enhances students' proficiency in English (Chang, 2010; Dupuy, 2000; Wu, 2006). Advantages and concerns perceived by interviewees on the use of English as a medium of instruction is consistent with what has been discussed in the literature. Quality of educational materials available in the public sector was a constantly raised issue. The using of English in private institutions has been valued in this regard. Faculty members who teach in both sectors attribute inadequate educational materials in the public sector to a lack of English instruction in the public sector.

“I teach in both public and private institutions. In the public one I feel constrained. I do not have many references in Arabic which I can ask my students to read. It is completely different in the private institution.”

“Not many reference publications are available in Arabic and it is very difficult for students to understand works written in English.”

Some even commented on the supplementary materials associated with Western textbooks. A faculty member remarked:

“the supplementary materials which come with the Western textbooks are really helpful; they come with PowerPoint slides, test-banks, case studies ... I find them to greatly enhance our teaching.”

A faculty member who teaches in both sectors commented:

“analytical skills are so much encouraged in English educational settings. Most instructors who can teach in English received their education in Western universities, which exposed them to the analytical way of teaching and learning.”

Some students and graduates from the public sector held similar views about the limitations they encounter from use of the Arabic language. A graduate from the public sector remarked:

“in addition to the fact that our limited knowledge of English inhibits our employment opportunities, we think that the use of Arabic in our programmes limits our knowledge too. Not many references are available in Arabic, and it is very difficult for us to understand works written in English.”

Students at private higher education institutions approved of the quality of books used, while this was not the case for students in the public sector. A number of public sector students and graduates expressed concern about the books and educational resources provided by their instructors. Some students from the public sector said that they did not even have textbooks for their courses. A student from the public sector explained:

“We do not have textbooks. We depend highly on our instructors’ notes when studying.”

While other students from the public sector had textbooks for their courses, they complained about the ones which they do have. A graduate from the public sector remarked:

“Though we shouldn’t be assigned only one reference, many instructors oblige us to only study the book that they published.”

A graduate from the public sector criticised their textbooks:

“We are given books that are really not useful. I remember one time there was a textbook written in a very complicated way. I didn’t understand a single word. I just had to memorise what was written for the exam.”

Another student commented:

“When I graduated I found myself with zero knowledge. We are using books that are really not useful as they are written in Arabic. We do not have or get introduced to real cases—mostly theoretical. Instructors encourage students to memorise to get better grades.”

A student from a private institution made a valuable point about why some Arabic textbooks can hardly be understood:

“Books in the public university are Arabised and in many cases do not make sense.”

The above comments were confirmed by some faculty members from the public sector. However, they provided justifications for students' complaints. Apparently, however, English is not the only issue. A faculty member from the public sector related the problem to the maturity of the instructors:

“Most of the instructors who work here [in the public sector] are old. They prefer to stick to the same books which will require less preparation. Those instructors just regurgitate what is in the book.”

A faculty member considered public sector bureaucracy to be a constraint upon instructors' use of educational materials:

“There is a lot of bureaucracy involved if an instructor wants to make changes in the syllabus.”

Many of the students from the private sector clearly approved of the quality of textbooks provided, mainly because they are “new and up to date”, and they indicated a sense of privilege in their English instruction. Having access to up-to-date learning resources is one of the many advantages students gain from the use of English by their private institutions.

However, western materials are not without their shortcomings. Some students complained about the use of Western textbooks for their irrelevance to the Saudi context. Two graduates of private higher education institutions commented:

“I think the books were up to the standard, but the only problem is that they are not applicable to the Saudi market.”

“Textbooks are entirely written in a European or American context. The instructors give the same examples provided in the book. You feel instructors are not up to date with what is happening in the Saudi market.”

Concerns about instructors not relating information to the Saudi context were shared by a number of students. A few students discussed this in relation to some of the

disadvantages of having non-Saudi instructors with little knowledge of the Saudi context. Another benefit was discussed by providers of private institutions. They observed that this facilitates collaboration with reputable Western universities. Students were also aware of this advantage. A student from the private sector commented:

“I do not think students of public universities have the privilege of attending exchange programmes similar to what we students from the private sector do.”

The use of English language in private institutions, however, is not without its limitations. Similar to the comments from some faculty members interviewed in this study, some studies including those of Chang (2010) and Wu (2006) found that students' comprehension of the subject matter is affected when using English Language for instruction. Heugh (2002), Flowerdew and Tauroza (1995) observed that using the mother tongue for education is more effective.

Many of the faculty interviewed discussed the challenge which some students face from the use of the English language in private institutions. According to some instructors, teaching in English is a barrier. A faculty member from a private institution commented:

“Sometimes I feel sorry we are teaching in English. We have many smart students here, but for them, I think, the use of English is a barrier to their success.”

Another instructor added:

“The first year in the university is a filtering year. In this first year I have some students who I think are not following what I am saying in English. What is interesting is that I no longer see them in my advanced classes. I think they have quit the institute as they could not pursue studies in English.”

An instructor commented:

“Students here [in private institutions] do speak English or do learn it in the preparatory year. However, this does not necessarily mean they know proper academic English.”

According to a study by Al-Saraj (2011) some students at private higher education institutions suffer anxiety while learning in English. The fact that students leave

secondary school with a less than satisfactory level of English has been a serious problem (Al-Mishary, 2006). Asharq Alawsat (2012) attributes students' failure to attain a necessary level of English to multiple factors, such as students' willingness to learn the English language, the quality of English curriculum, textbooks used, and methods of teaching. Al-Ghamdi (2005) finds that memorisation and grammar-translation methods used in English teaching play a significant role in this negative outcome.

However, not all students are faced with this problem - some are much better prepared in a different path of education. Private secondary education leads many students to private higher education institutions. The majority of student interviewees from private institutions were graduates of private secondary education, with only a small number being graduates of public secondary education. Private schools attach greater importance to the English language than public schools. Students of private schools, generally, are only second to international schools in the ratio of their English-language instruction. Unlike public schools, which have begun teaching English to students in the seventh grade (only recently revised to the fourth), private schools teach English as a separate subject, starting in kindergarten and extending through high school.

Exposure to the English language from an early age was not the only difference between students in private schools from their counterparts in public schools. -the quality of English teaching is much higher in private schools as well. While public and private schools are required to follow the syllabus and use textbooks assigned by the Ministry of Education, private schools can teach more advanced English courses alongside the one mandated by the Ministry of Education. Therefore, students from private schools are found to be less intimidated in pursuing their higher education in English in the interviews.

The following section presents the challenge which private institutions face while recruiting faculty when the use of English partially contributes to the issue. While it is an internationally accepted fact that the use of English in higher education allows more mobility among students and academics (Coleman, 2006), this is not exactly the case for Saudi Arabia, as is presented in the section below.

The Faculty Recruitment Challenge

Providers of private higher education have experienced challenges in recruiting qualified faculty, which is a pressing issue, especially with the rapid expansion of higher education in the country and in the neighbouring GCC states. Instruction in English in private institutions has increased the difficulties in recruiting faculty. Teachers need to be competent not only in the subject they teach, but also must be competent in the language of instruction.

The socio-religious status quo in the Kingdom perhaps causes discomforts to many Westerners. This factor has a significant impact on the ability of private higher education institutions to attract good foreign instructors. Although Saudi Arabia might be seen as an attractive place for Muslim instructors who might value being close to the holy places, this is not the case for non-Muslim Arabs or faculty from Western countries. Even after the modernisation of the KSA, people preferred to go to other Gulf States, which are relatively more open, allowing them to lead similar lifestyles to those they had enjoyed in their own countries. A vice dean of a private college complained:

“It is really hard to attract faculty from other countries to come and teach in a strict country like Saudi Arabia.”

A faculty member from a private institution echoed this view, adding:

“Saudi Arabia is not an attractive working place for many foreigners, including those from other Arab countries. They would prefer to go to other GCC states which are less restrictive than Saudi Arabia. They can live and enjoy the same freedom that they have in their own countries.”

Private higher education institutions have not only found it difficult to attract faculty from other countries, but have also found it challenging to attract faculty from the public sector. It should be emphasised that the higher education sector, until recently (2005), was not an attractive working place because of the relatively low level of remuneration. According to a faculty member from the public sector:

“The low salary issue together with the stifling bureaucracy in the public sector have both, to some extent, caused many good university graduates to refrain from joining the teaching profession and to seek work elsewhere.”

This made public higher education dependent for many years on the same Saudi faculty who had been privileged enough to be sent abroad on government scholarships. Later, in the 1980s, when the country's financial situation changed drastically, there was a substantial decrease in the budget available for scholarships. Thus, the public sector depended for many years on the same faculty. Some of those who reached their retirement age were reappointed by individual contracts.

When private higher education institutions were opened, public sector faculty saw in it a means of supplementing their income by teaching in both sectors. However, it was available only for those who could work in English. Therefore, the private sector is limited in its use of public sector staff to those who are bilingual. Apart from the employment security that the public sector provided, there was not much difference in remuneration between the sectors. The private sector's reimbursement might have been somewhat higher, attracting temporary workers to the sector. However, the King's Decree No. 227/A, issued on 21st September, 2005, increased the salaries of public sector employees, including those in higher education institutions, by 15%. Added to that were several types of allowances (Alriyadh,2005)which also made the public sector more attractive to many. According to a faculty member in the public sector:

“Why should I work in a private institution when I am here receiving a higher salary and working in a less demanding environment?”

It is important to note that private institutions vary in their salary levels, and without more information in this regard, it is hard to confirm that private institutions on average offer lower salaries than public institutions. As to private institutions being a more demanding work environment, a faculty member from the private sector commented:

“Workloads in private institutions are much higher than those in public institutions. We in private institutions work from 8 am to 4 pm. Most instructors in the public sector give their lectures and then they leave. I believe faculty in the public sector have more flexible working hours.”

She also compared job security in public and private institutions:

“Faculty in private institutions renew their contracts on an annual basis, which lead most Saudis to conclude that these jobs are not all secure.”

For other faculty members, private higher education is a better environment:

“I have not worked in public institutions but I believe, in the public sector, it is more challenging to be recognised. There it is difficult to know who is working and who is not. There are many offices. I do not see staff to be moving between departments as is the case here in private institutions.”

“I am so glad to be working in a private university, though I have been offered work in public institutions. The amount of flexibility and creativity that I have in private institutions is not comparable to that of a public one.”

Notwithstanding the above, private higher education institutions continue to employ some faculty from the public sector. A number of those who retired from the public sector find places in private institutions. Within the chosen private institutions, there were more than five prominent, highly regarded faculty members from the public sector. They were deans and vice deans in private higher education institutions in the city of Jeddah. It would be valuable to research further the motivation of public sector staff who move to the private sector. The private sector’s use of faculty from the public sector has been negatively perceived by some interviewees holding managerial positions in the public sector. Three faculty members complained:

“Private institutions offer subjects that they are not fully prepared for. I believe that private institutions should not start a programme unless they have the resources available. The question is, why do they open such a programme if they are not fully prepared for it?”

A faculty member from the public sector suggested that the private sector should stop relying on the public sector for their human resources:

“They [the private sector] should invest highly in building their own human resources rather than depending on their counterpart.”

He added:

“Private institutions are more autonomous. In contrast, we [the public sector] are more regulated by the Government. We are restricted by a budget. They have the complete freedom and flexibility to bring in the best faculty from anywhere, they have the funds allowing them to bring the best instructors, yet they use and borrow our faculty members.”

Despite this negative perception of private institutions' borrowing of faculty from the public sector, others saw it in a positive way. A faculty member who teaches in both sectors believed this to be beneficial for both individuals and for the economy:

“Private institutions are creating markets for academics. It creates jobs which is good for the economy.”

A few students from the private sector think the presence of faculty from the public sector gives private institutions more credibility:

“As most instructors in private higher education come from KAU [public university], this makes a good standard of education.”

The public sector is not happy with lending their faculty to private higher education institutions, despite the fact that such practices are not free but rather involves financial inputs from the private sector. Some from the public sector seem to be unaware of the complex procedures that private institutions go through in attracting and recruiting qualified faculty from other places. This includes obtaining visas from the Ministry of Labour to recruit international faculty members. The challenges facing private higher education institutions in recruiting faculty members were also confirmed by the MOHE representative who said:

“MOHE believes that there are challenges with respect to the recruitment of faculties and technicians in special disciplines such as medicine, technology, and engineering fields. These challenges are more visible in the degree and also in geographically remote areas.”

Borrowing faculty members from the public sector is not always an option, especially when the private sector offers subjects, or courses are not available the public sector. Private institutions have come to rely on recent Saudi MA graduates of international universities. Students who were sent abroad on King Abdullah's Scholarship Programme should, upon their return, form a pool from which private higher education institutions can recruit. However, some students with a serious attitude towards their studies prefer to have foreign instructors who do not speak Arabic. A student from the private sector commented:

“Most of the lecturing and the discussion in the class will be in Arabic, especially if the class has no non-Arabic-speaking students.”

The challenge has even increased with the MOHE licensing requirements. The Ministry requires the faculty to be PhD holders and to put a maximum of 20% for Master degree holders.

The number of part-time lecturers is not permitted to exceed 25% of the total faculty in a college. Upon achieving these standards, the institution will receive a general accreditation. An administrator in a private college commented on these regulations:

“We’d like to bring artists and graphic designers into the classroom. They have valuable skills to offer. But that isn’t possible now because all faculty must have PhDs or Master degrees.”

Before then, private institutions used to depend highly on part-time faculty. In addition, the majority of the faculty were Master degree holders, only a few were PhD holders, and I even knew some with Bachelor degrees. Part-time faculty in private institutions included faculty from public institutions and others who are professionals from the labour market. An administrator in one of the private institutions highlighted the challenges in recruiting good experienced staff facing the private sector, as she explained:

“We used to hire part-time instructors who worked in the field that they were teaching. Students used to praise them a lot for the practical knowledge they brought to the class. We no longer have the flexibility to hire part-timers because to be accredited, not less than 75% of the faculty members have to be full-time.”

Private institutions’ reliance on part-time faculty is a common feature for private higher education, e.g. in Portugal (Amaral et al., 2007), Poland (Jablecka, 2007) Austria (Pechar et al., 2007), with different opinions on its impact on the quality of the institutions. While this might be true, we should not undermine the value of having an expert from the labour market, especially if the courses provided have market-orientation. One fifth of employers interviewed raised the issue. An employer I interviewed reflected on his conversation with an instructor from a private institution (who was visiting with some of his students):

“I was not impressed. The problem is that most of the lecturers have only an academic background and lack practical knowledge. I wonder what effect this has on the learning of the students.”

Another employer who was a former faculty member in a public university suggested that instructors should also have practical background in the subject being taught. She explained how the majority of those teaching business subjects there were purely academics. Many did not have any experience of the real world of business:

“If I had the power, I would provide co-op training (not only to students) but to academics so they would come back with better understanding of the real work world which will definitely affect their production of knowledge.”

Another faculty member from the public sector confirmed:

“Most instructors here [public institutions] do not have or have limited practical experience.”

The fact that private institutions borrow faculty from the public sector make these comments applicable for the private higher education institutions as well.

The Labour Market Challenge

As highlighted in the previous sections, private higher education institutions in the KSA are distinct in offering their programmes in English. The relevance of the English language was confirmed by all employers who considered competence in that language to be the most important skill which most applicants lacked. Employers have emphasised the importance of the English language, as they said:

“There are a set of skills which we look for. English is the most important for our organisation.”

“[English is] very important; all our communications are in English.”

Students and graduates of the public sector attribute their unemployment to their poor command of the English language. Students and graduates from a public university remarked:

“Our opportunities in the labour market are limited because we lack English.”

“If days could come back I would rather go to a private college for the English Language. The biggest problem we encounter when we go out to the labour market is the lack of English.”

“In my opinion, a person with high school but competent in the English language is better than with a university degree and with no English.”

“The notion that graduates are not prepared for the job market has nothing to do with the kind of knowledge they gained. It’s about the English language and communication skills.”

A graduate from the public sector explained what happened to her while applying for a job:

“When I was applying for a job companies were refraining from me, saying, ‘For sure you’re not competent in English, as you’re from a public university!’”

It is worth noting that in the past, English was not crucial for employment since the public sector was the automatic career destination for university graduates: Arabic was the medium of communication in that sector. However, the situation in the labour market has changed. The public sector has been saturated, and the private sector is the only option for most graduates now.

One of the most commonly cited qualities of private sector graduates was their superior fluency in English. In this area, they were seen as clearly superior to graduates of most public institutions. Employers from the service sector commented:

“[Graduates] of public institutions are missing a core element, which is the language, which affects the whole operation. If we don’t speak the same language, how would we then be able to communicate?”

“We mainly deal with private institutions. We are guaranteed that their students have this skill.”

“We value the fluency of some [graduates of private institutions] in speaking English.”

“Public institutions have a strong curriculum but the only problem is the English language.”

Academics from the private sector expressed enthusiasm and confidence in the employability of their students, particularly stressing that those superior English skills would provide a market advantage.

“The fact that our graduates speak English makes them more liked in the market. English gives them extra value in the market. We can say that English can increase employment chances and opportunities for our graduates.”

This confident prediction was not borne out of the comments of employers, at least not to the same extent. On balance, however, employer respondents were positive about the employment potential of graduates from the private sector, although they regarded graduates from the elite public sector school KFUPM and from foreign universities as generally better-prepared. One third of the employers interviewed found graduates from private institutions to be less competent in English than students of KFUPM University—which is the only public university which conducts all its classes in English.

An employer interviewee from the banking sector remarked:

“Not all students from the private sector come to us competent enough in writing reports. While the best written reports we receive are those delivered from graduates of KFUPM and from those who graduated abroad, we still value the fluency of some in speaking English.”

A student from a private university also commented on her competence in English in the workplace after she graduated:

“Yes, most of us from private colleges were fluent in spoken English as we were used to travelling abroad, but we had a difficult time when writing reports in English.”

Employers’ observations confirm students’ worries as discussed in the earlier chapter on not having teachers who are competent enough in the English Language. Interestingly, a faculty member who had worked in both sectors of higher education thought that employers exaggerated the importance of the English language, remarking:

“It’s true that the English language is important these days, but there are a number of occupations that do not require its use. Do you think salespersons and marketers need to be fluent in English where most, if not all, of their clients are Arabic speakers?”

She added:

“It’s an excuse that the private sector uses to avoid hiring Saudi nationals. I hope that they will not now come up with other excuses.”

My interviewee from the recruiting agency also agreed that employers should not give the English competence question more importance or weight than is necessary. He recommended that:

“Employers should also consider those who do not speak English as they may be more knowledgeable and/or skilled than those who speak the language. Furthermore, if the organisation has few who speak it, they should complement those who do not.”

While it is true that English might not be needed in contexts where it is not the official language, graduates’ competence in English gives them broader employment opportunities. Graduates with competence are not constrained to work in the local market. A faculty member from the private sector commented:

“Though Arabic is the local language, if thousands of students graduating from business majors only speak the business language in Arabic, will those students be prepared for the market? This is the paradox, we are opening doors for external market, but we are not graduating students who are ready for this market. Where will students work if they lack the English language which is needed in every single business enterprise?”

Conclusion

Private institutions' use of English for instruction is found to have impacts on all three phases discussed previously in Part III of the study. English is found to have an impact on students' choice of and access to private higher education. While English is used in private classrooms and is a major attraction of private higher education, it was a major reason for others to refrain from the private. English is perceived to contribute to the quality of education delivered in private higher education institutions. English usage gives access to up-to-date books and learning resources not available in public universities. Nevertheless, this is not free of challenges. The private sector finds it challenging to recruit qualified faculty, partly because English fluency is required. It is difficult to recruit from abroad. Public sector teaching jobs are less demanding and have equal pay, but the private sector does hire some talented public faculty who have retired. As in so many other areas which this study has explored, employers found English fluency to be quite significant—indeed, the most important job skill. While it may be questioned whether English is needed in the majority of jobs in the Kingdom, graduates were expected to write business reports in English. Employers also linked fluency in English to good communication skills and to self-confidence. It is also perceived as a gateway to good jobs in a global economy.

Chapter 10

Private Higher Education and the State

Introduction

In a state such as Saudi Arabia, where the Government is heavily involved in all aspects of the economy and public life, it is impossible to ignore its role in the emergence of the private higher education sector. We have seen in Chapter 2 how governments' stances about the sector are found to affect the nature and the function[s] of the private sector. In order to better understand the emergence of this sector and its development, it is therefore necessary to understand the relationship between the Saudi Government and private education institutions. The exploration of this relationship is discussed in this chapter mainly through the perceptions of providers of private higher education and complemented with information from the Ministry of Higher Education policy documents.

The relationship between private higher education and the Government is most clearly seen through the Government's regulation of that sector. In general, regulatory frameworks on private higher education involve: authorising the private sector to provide higher education; financially supporting that sector or granting operating incentives; assessing, evaluating, and approving the programmes; and controlling the quality of the sector (Zumeta, 1992, 1996, 2011; Fielden & Varghese, 2009). As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, governments have different stances towards private higher education, namely, *laissez faire*, central planning, and market competitive (Zumeta, 1996, 2011). Nevertheless, Levy (2011) suggests that even governments which used to fall into the *laissez-faire* category are now instituting some regulations in relation to the private sector. According to Levy (2011) "as private higher education grows largely on its own, often sharply, it becomes crucial to access policy." (p.383). Fielden and Varghese (2009, pp. 71-72) explain:

"Higher education should not be left to the vagaries of market forces. Markets are more reliable in ensuring efficiency than equity, while the role in ensuring quality is debatable. An unregulated free marketing higher education may lead to investment in the sector by low-quality providers that adversely affect the best interest of the ultimate consumers." (pp.71-72)

As noted by the above authors, ensuring high standards of quality is one of the motives for governments to regulate the private higher education sector.

A number of countries, those of Eastern and Central Europe among them, experienced a period where higher education was freely open to the private sector. In these countries, government regulations on the private sector of higher education emerged only after the Government realised that the absence of regulations had had a detrimental effect on the quality of higher education (Levy, 2007). In Poland, for instance, the Government created the State Accreditation Commission in 2001, after ten years of limited government oversight of private higher education. This quasi-autonomous body became responsible for evaluating both public and private institutions (Duczmal, 2006). This illustrates what Levy calls “reactive policymaking.” (Levy, 2011).

Saudi Arabia does not fall within the category described above by Levy (2011) as no private higher education institutions existed before the Government’s approval of their establishment. Unlike other countries where government regulations are developed to govern already existing private institutions, in Saudi Arabia government regulation of private sector higher education was designed before private higher education institutions existed. Nevertheless, those polices have not been comprehensive, as the private sector is still relatively new. Modifications or new policies are introduced now and then.

The Reluctant State

As discussed in Chapter 1, the current expansion of the Saudi private higher education sector is the result of a 1998 decree which authorised the creation of new private higher education institutions. These had not previously existed in the country since the nationalisation of King Abdul-Aziz University in 1967, an institution which began as a private school. The rise of Saudi private higher education was perceived by most of the interviewees from the management level to be late. Interestingly, this delay was perceived by some as resistance by the Government to incorporate the private sector into the higher education system. This delay was also perceived negatively as demonstrating a lack of planning and the absence of vision on the part of policymakers. A board member of a private college remarked:

“... you feel the Government was in denial of the demographic growth in the country. I am surprised that policy-makers did not consider how all these babies would sooner or later be pursuing their higher education.”

A former Dean of a private college added:

“Although there was high demand and the necessity for private higher education in KSA a long time ago, there was not any action taken from the Government, I just feel there was no grand planning.”

A former Ministry official put his criticism in stronger terms:

“The Government was in denial, afraid of loss of control.”

Some interviewees interpreted the Government’s hesitancy regarding private sector higher education to a concern that the private sector would not meet accepted quality standards. A former dean of a private university remarked:

“I think [delay in the provision of private higher education] resulted from a concern over quality”

Another official remarked:

“There was some hesitancy and fear within the Government that private higher education would endanger the quality of public schools, based on the assumption that the public higher education sector was of high quality. It was an act of protectionism, to keep the public higher-education sector from deteriorating. “

It is not surprising to find that quality was the big concern for the Government, as a number of countries has suffered from low quality private higher education. Though the nationalisation of King Abdulaziz University was not in any way linked with poor educational quality, few participants in the study suggested possible reasons for late Government approval of private higher education. Four of my interviewees believe that the Government’s lack of enthusiasm can be attributed to its 1967 experience with the private King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah. They all believed that the Government’s previous experience in dealing with private higher education in the Kingdom informed its caution and negatively affected its attitude. One of the interviewees even described a significant educational authority’s attitude when private investors suggested the idea of private higher education. That authority stated that the prevailing feeling among Government officials was that private higher education institutions would eventually be made the responsibility of the Government, as was the case with King Abdul Aziz University:

“. . . and then you will throw it back to the Government as you did previously with King Abdul Aziz University.”

A senior faculty member from the public sector argued that the Government should not base its decision on its previous experience with KAAU, he remarked:

“KAAU was atypical as a private higher education institution because it was completely tuition-free, which is not the case with the new private higher education institutions.”

Also, some respondents attributed the Government’s reluctance to allow private higher education to its need to maintain full control over the education sector. One interviewee, an employer, observed:

“The Government in the KSA likes to have full control over all its sectors and services. Policy-makers took many years before they allowed the private sector to take part in any service.”

Another administrator from the public sector agreed:

“They want to say: we are here, we are the Government, and we can provide higher education to the whole society. There was a period that the Government didn't like the private sector in general.”

A faculty member at a private university who formerly worked at a public university added:

“Lectures and student activities used to be highly monitored by the authorities to minimise political dissent. It is possible that the Government feared loss of control if private higher education institutions were to proliferate.”

The above views suggest government hesitancy to allow private higher education was based on quality, political and ideological reasons. Whatever is really the case, the Government has been addressing such fears through its policies. Concerning quality, for example, the Government has introduced firm regulations concerning licensing and accreditation. That said, as will be seen in the coming chapter, private institutions have more flexibility and freedom with their activities than those in the public sector. As to the Government's fear about the influence of the West, while it is difficult to control, at least has minimised it by not allowing any Western branches where it might have less control.

As illustrated above, the Government have been criticised for being late in its decision to permit private higher education. Interviewees had different perceptions of the reasons for the Government's delay. It may be, however, that these respondents were implicitly comparing government policy on private higher education to other arenas of KSA government policy, at least more than to private higher education policy in other countries, which they may know little about. The Saudi Government's 1998 decision to permit private higher education may well have been influenced by the observation of regional trends allowing private higher education. As has been documented in Chapter 1, other states in the Arab world, particularly other members of the GCC, were taking similar steps toward creating or expanding private higher education sector. In addition, the 90s was a period in which private sector education proliferated not only in the Arab

world but worldwide. However, it took the Saudi government around a decade to approve the establishment of this sector in the Kingdom.

After almost a decade of hesitation, the Government finally allowed private sector participation in higher education. We can see how the Government moved from opposing to uncertain to allowing. The Governments regulatory framework will be examined below.

The Controlling State: Licensing and Regulations

Among those interviewed, the predominant response to the creation of the private higher education sector was that it was largely unplanned and may have been experimental.

“There was no fertile ground that would help with improvement. I think it was a kind of a trial-and-error phase in the beginning. The Ministry of Higher Education issued a decision that allowed the private sector to participate in higher education provision. “

Another faculty member echoed the same view and added:

“ It[the private higher education sector] came un planned “

The Saudi Government announced its approval on June 8th 1998, through Decree Number 33, a year after approving the regulations on the sector set by the Ministry of Higher Education. This may indicate that policymaking toward private higher education was proactive. At first, the Ministry’s approval and regulations were only for non-profit higher education institutions, limiting the establishment of private higher education to charity foundations. Nevertheless, two years later, Decree No. 212 (September 1st 2000) was issued. Additional regulations were approved allowing the private sector to establish for-profit higher education institutions. Since then, for-profit private higher education institutions have proliferated in the KSA. According to Al-Eassa (2010), after the introduction of the regulations for the non-for-profit status of private institutions, no application was made to establish such institutions – everyone went for the non-for-profit model. .

It was observed that government regulations on both types of institutions are exactly the same. The reason that causes providers to choose between being for-profit or non-for-profit was not investigated. It is clear, however, that the Saudi Government have not given the non-for-profit institutions any extra facilities that would encourage private institutions to be non-for-profit. One might argue, however, that non-for-profit institutions have the advantage of not paying the tax that for-profit institutions have to pay. In Saudi Arabia, unlike in other countries, 2.5% is a fixed tax rate which should not have a significant affect on the profits to be generated by private institutions. Aside

from the Government, people might be more willing to give their donations or “zakat”- - fixed portion of one’s wealth to non-for-profit private higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia.

Regulations on Saudi private higher education involve 28 articles (MOHE, 2012b). They cover ownership requirements -- i.e., prospective investors are obliged to have a minimum of five partners in every venture. They also cover authorisation requirements and procedures. Article 7 asserts that institutional programmes should be designed to meet labour market demands and the country’s Development Plan. Article 19 affirms the supervisory role of the Ministry of Higher Education in ensuring private institutions’ compliance with all regulations and approving private institutions (systems, council, departments, programmes, and study plans). Article 23 requires private higher education institutions to refrain from making any changes to those elements listed above without having the Ministry of Higher Education’s approval. The Council of Ministries’ Decree No. 35/1/1389 (January 1st 2001) set out the executive rules, administrative procedures, and technical regulations for private colleges (Al-Dali & Al-Rayes, 2009). The Saudi government, as represented by the Ministry of Higher Education, defines its relation with the private sector as joint planning and joint organization (Al-Dali & Al-Rayes, 2009). These two kinds of relations are covered through licensing and accreditation requirements set by the Ministry of Higher Education as will be discussed below.

New private higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia are required to be licensed by the Ministry of Higher Education in order to operate. These private institutions go through four stages before they receive the final approval: preliminary licence, general approval, special approval, and final licence (Al-Dali & Al-Rayes, 2009; MOHE, 2012b). A preliminary licence is granted to the institution upon the acceptance of a feasibility study showing the need for the subjects offered, together with details of the venture, such as:

1. Objectives of establishing the Private Higher Education Institutions and its mission.
2. The total cost of the venture including cost of land, buildings and facilities.
3. Ways of financing the venture.
4. Financial status of the proposers and their ability to sustain the venture.
5. Details of the owners and their background.
6. The site of the institution.

7. The maximum absorption capacity of the institution.
8. The expected number of students to be enrolled in every major.
9. The fees to be charged.
10. The institution's plans for staff recruitment and faculty qualifications.
11. The expected starting date after gaining approval. (MOHE, 2012b)

A co-founder of a private college believed these requirements went too far:

“The requirements of the preliminary licence are based on fear of failure. People in the Government still remember the failure of KAAU as a private university, which was over 40 years ago! But KAAU was tuition-free. What we are trying to do is completely different.”

Among those interviewed, there were some criticisms of the licensing process. A private college administrator observed:

“The four stages of licensing are reasonable but the MOHE bureaucracy is very slow to act. These Ministry officials do not have a vision of what private higher education could achieve. They want it to be like the public universities. They are afraid of risk. They don’t want to take a chance.”

Another administrator also commented on the inefficiency of the licensing process:

“The four stages the MOHE has defined for licensing make sense in theory. But so far there are no set timelines for this approval process. We in the private sector never know where we are, when we will be approved—if at all.”

A committee in the Ministry of Higher Education is in charge of the next stage, general approval. Its membership includes ministry staff, as well as others recruited from the nation's universities. The committee has the responsibility for evaluating the physical facilities and the technical and organisational state of the institution. It is particularly concerned that the institution should meet approved standards in the capacity of the buildings, the quality of classrooms/lecture halls, the adequacy of laboratories and computer facilities, the availability of language laboratories and a library, as well as the quality of faculty offices and health units. The Ministry sets specific standards for each category, which the private institutions must meet.

The Committee also examines the organisational structure of the institution and the existence and appointment of: a board of trustees; a dean, deputy deans, and departmental principals; and a college council and departmental councils. They also examine faculty qualifications in each department of the institution.

The third stage--special approval--is concerned with the academic plans of the private educational institution. This involves the Ministry sending the institution's academic plans to three different outstanding higher education institutions specialising in the fields under assessment. Those institutions are asked to evaluate the academic plans proposed by the applicant institution. A committee at MOHE then discusses the evaluation provided by the three experts from each of the assessing universities. The resulting collective assessment is then discussed with the applicant. The General Committee of Licensing and Approval then grants the approval of the academic program. However, as specified in Article 23 of the regulations governing the private sector, the Ministry must also approve any changes in the academic plans. The same rule also applies to any adjustments in the institution's rules and procedures. A special approval licence is then granted upon compliance with these detailed academic criteria. This third stage of licensing regarding academic plans drew some critical responses. An administrator from a private college remarked:

“The third level of approval—that affects academic plans—is still problematic. We tried to open an institution for girls who can’t study abroad. We wanted a new American-style curriculum. It was a disaster. The MOHE held up the entire curriculum. We learned that you have to use the curriculum from one of the public universities and later try to adjust it.”

A faculty member from a private college had a similar comment:

“We tried to get approval for a new 4-year degree programme in a market-oriented degree program. It got stuck in the MOHE for a year because of the new curriculum, the course content. Yet this was the kind of programme the economy desperately needs from higher education.”

Nevertheless, in 2004, the National Commission for Academic Assessment and Accreditation (NCAAA) was created as an independent body by the Ministry of Higher

Education. It works under the Higher Education Council but has an administrative and financial autonomy (MOHE, 2004). This accrediting body was established after licensing procedures were developed, it was given the responsibility of assessing higher education institutions, and, based on its possible evaluation, the private institution could become nationally accredited. It should be emphasised that as yet no Saudi private institution has been accredited--eight years after the NCAAA was established.

The fourth stage of the licensing process culminates in the issuing of the final license to operate. This is granted upon ensuring that the institution has fulfilled all the requirements of the three stages discussed above, together with a major final requirement of a financial guarantee. This is an insurance policy provided by the institution to the Ministry, to ensure that the Ministry can run the institution should the venture fail, thus ensuring continuity of education for the students. The guarantee is calculated at 5,000 Saudi Riyal (SR) per student, with the total amount dependent on the proposed capacity of the institution. Providers of private higher education have found this bank guarantee to be difficult to meet. An owner-partner from one private college explained:

“This is a very serious financial burden on us. We have to get a bank guarantee. We now have 4,000 students at 5,000 Saudi Riyals per student so that’s 20 million Riyals per year. And the guarantee must be renewed each year with charges from the bank.”

A private College Board member spoke along the same lines:

“The licensing requirements mean we must put up a guarantee of 5,000 Riyals for each student. That is a very high demand...especially for those colleges which now have thousands of students enrolled.”

The owner-partner cited above also understood the reasons for the financial guarantee:

“The Government might lift the requirement of the financial guarantee but they are still waiting to see if we are strong, financially, and can sustain our institutions.”

An Administrator at a private college spoke of the financial burden of these licensing and financial requirements:

“The requirements of the MOHE are costly for those operating private institutions. We have an employee who must travel from Jeddah to Riyadh 2 to 3 days per week

to meet with the MOHE staff to discuss licensing, accreditation, registration, financial guarantees, payments.”

While the National Commission for Academic Assessment and Accreditation has been playing an important role in the licensing of private higher education institutions, its role in ensuring the quality of the sector will be discussed below.

Quality assurance mechanisms in private higher education are found to be closely linked to the proliferation of demand-absorbing private higher education institutions (Lemaitre, 2009). Before then, the size of the private higher education sector was small and the presence of such a mechanism was not necessary. Teixeira (2006) and Galbraith (2003) discuss the fact that many countries are suffering from low-quality private higher education institutions. The accreditation of higher education institutions--whether public or private--has been a policy concern in many countries (Eaton 2007). Many governments have been active in launching accreditation requirements to evaluate the academic standards of private higher education institutions. The responsibility for accreditation varies between countries. Kinser et al (2010) suggest “new quality assurance mechanisms and regulatory regimes have emerged to address the specific issues raised by non-state sponsored educational entities”(p. ix). Altbach et al. (2009) suggests that the presence of accreditation policies can enhance the quality of private institutions by stimulating competition and ensuring the survival of the best.

The Ministry of Higher Education’s licensing regulations and accreditation requirement discussed above emphasize the Government’s concern with the quality of private higher education institutions. The former Dean of a private college commented:

“Of course, the quality of higher education provided by private institutions has been a concern for the Government. There is a perception around the world that public institutions are better than private ones. Among the practices of the Government to control this quality is the NCAAA.”

Kinser et al (2010) have observed that, in many countries, quality assurance has been established to address quality issues in private higher education. But in the KSA the presence of this accrediting body has been important to address quality issues in both sectors. Nevertheless, the presence of private higher education may have expedited its presence.

Established in 2004, the NCAAA arranged with every university in the Kingdom to have a quality assurance department to supervise quality mechanisms and to ensure compliance with its requirements. Higher education institutions need to be re-accredited by the NCAAA once every five years. The National Commission has been actively working with higher education institutions, both public and private. A number of workshops were conducted to educate academics and staff about the National Commission's standards and the way the assessment works. Institutions have been instructed to self-assess themselves according to the Commission's criteria. The private higher education institutions I visited stressed how hard they have been working to meet the Commission's requirements. A dean of a private college commented on the external examiners' work:

“The external reviewers sent in by the NCAAA meet with our faculty, students, check out course content, educational materials, look at our libraries. They give us lots of comments, most of them helpful.”

An administrator added:

“We have a full-time employee for our quality assurance department. She was trained by Americans. She's very tough.”

Not all university administration officials found these quality controls easy to deal with.

A dean remarked:

“The NCAAA's quality assurance requirements took us a lot longer than we expected. We had trouble complying with them. Maybe they go too far, but I'm for the quality they ensure.”

The costs of quality assurance have also been an issue. A private College Board member was particularly critical:

“The Government tried to charge our college 2.5% of scholarship payments for the Government's role in quality assurance. This was in addition to the amount we pay directly to the NCAAA each year.”

While all private higher education institutions have been working to meet the requirements of the National Commission, at the time of this writing, only a small number have finished their internal assessment. External reviewers--who were experts

recruited by the National Commission from the UK, Australia, and the USA--visited these private higher education institutions. Evidence for compliance with the requirements of the NCAAA must be verified by the reviewing committee through random selection of elements and people from the institutions being examined. Though this quality assurance scheme is being applied to both public and private higher education institutions, the private sector has been more concerned about it. That is because private higher education institutions will not receive their final licence from the Ministry unless they pass the accreditation requirements, thus it will have an impact on their credibility. A former dean of a private college observed:

“Those of us active in trying to establish private higher education in the kingdom, we asked the Government to create an independent group to assess quality. We said—please evaluate us by international standards...it’s the only thing that will give us credibility.”

Another administrator from a private college also stressed the importance of quality on the mobility of their students:

“Independent quality assessment is the only thing that will create trust in our schools. Also, if some of our students continue their education abroad, we want our credits accepted.

This contrasts with the public sector, in which there is still no quality mechanism that affects their operations. Unlike the public sector, public institutions do not need to be accredited or licensed by the Government. In addition, in the public sector, there is still no link between accreditation and budget allocation in the. In fact, the most critical comment about the Government's relationship with the private sector came from an interviewee's speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Higher Education:

“My only concern is that the NCAAA plays its role in ensuring a minimum level of quality of the private higher education institutions. My concern is also applicable to public higher education institutions. My personal opinion is that NCAAA is not doing its job effectively at the moment.”

It is clear that the Ministry of Higher Education is taking measures to promote the quality of private higher education. Levy (2009, 2011) discusses how it is not always

clear whether such regulations are truly practised or not. Interviews with providers of private higher education suggest that such regulations are not only text on paper but are actually implemented and that the Government is serious about it. While some find such regulations to be overwhelming, others find the Government involvement and regulations to be indispensable.

According to the Government itself, the Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for all aspects of private higher education in the KSA. According to the same Ministry official cited above:

“The Ministry of Higher Education has full control and influence. This is because the bylaws of private higher education give the Minister of Higher Education full responsibility and authority in most of the related important issues.”

The regulations for private higher education published by the MOHE tend to support this position. According to these rules, the Ministry is involved in all aspects of decision-making. For example, the appointments of college deans need to be approved by the Ministry. Similarly, Boards of Trustees for private institutions must include representatives from the Ministry. College councils also contain members appointed by the Ministry. Any changes to the curriculum in a private institution require approval from the Ministry, since they constitute an alteration of the original licence. However, comments from interviewees didn't suggest they perceived the Government's level of involvement as particularly high. Most managerial staff appeared to be positive towards the regulations by the Ministry. Administrators from the private sector, some of whom had previously worked in the public sector, regarded the Government's involvement as manageable rather than stifling:

“It is good to have the Government involved. I find the Government involvement is good in structuring us. I find the Ministry to be flexible; we are learning from them and they are learning from us and this goes back to the fact that we have a wonderful King. I do not find them too rigid.”

Another administrator remarked:

“My experience with the Ministry is a positive one. In our meetings they listen openly to our suggestions and take them into consideration.”

Some interviewees characterised the Government's involvement as strict, but again these comments were largely positive. A former dean of a private college observed:

“In a culture like ours, there is a high need for strict involvement from the Government. Otherwise, you can imagine how things would be going.”

A dean of a private college added a qualification:

“There are two sides to government involvement. Financial involvement usually goes with its control. At the beginning, we were not happy to follow the rules and regulations from the Government. However, we can now see its effects. In my opinion, it has been good for protecting the quality of the education we offer.”

Overall, interviewees from private higher educational institutions (many of whom had experience working in the public sector) had a positive response to the subject of the relationship between the Ministry of Higher Education and the private sector. Some faculty respondents criticised what they saw as obstructive or misguided policies; but, overall, interviewees saw the Ministry's oversight as important in maintaining the quality of education in the private sector. One recurring concern with that oversight is the issue of flexibility. A private sector administrator remarked:

“Government control is okay but there needs to be flexibility, less bureaucracy in the procedures.”

A board member of the same school observed:

“The government needs more flexibility in dealing with each college. There have to be adjustments based on the situation, what each college is trying to do.”

While some providers of private higher education perceived the government to be strict and to lack flexibility with the private sector, the private sector still enjoys more freedom in managing their institutions.

The State's financial support to Private Higher Education

Across the globe, financing higher education has been a major challenge facing governments. Thus, as discussed earlier, the increasing demand for higher education and governments' insufficient funds to meet this demand have been important factors behind the proliferation of private higher education institutions.

Levy (2011) also explains how private higher education institutions receive different support from the Government, according to their type (elite, semi-elite, or demand-absorbing, for-profit or not-for-profit). Thus, the same government could have different stances depending on the type of private higher education institution. Government regulation of the private sector does not imply financial support. The relationship between institutional autonomy and government financial support is not always clear. There are countries where governments have too much control over higher education institutions while not providing any financial support to that sector (Levy, 2010a). This section presents the kind of support that private institutions get from the Government.

During the pilot study, I found financial constraints to be a major concern for private higher education providers. As in many private education institutions around the world, tuition fees have been the main financial resource for those institutions in the KSA. Nevertheless, at the beginning, recruiting students was a big challenge for private higher education as their tuition fees are considered high when compared to the public sector which is not only tuition fees free but also provides students with monthly stipends. The Dean of a private college commented:

“Tuition fees charged by the private sector, though modest, are always perceived to be high. Comparison is always drawn with the public sector where not only tuition is free, but a student also receives a monthly stipend from the State.”

Another dean of a private college further addressed the issue of stipends:

“...I believe stipends that are being paid to students in the public sector have a strong effect on some students' decision whether to go to public or private higher education institutions. This, as a result, affects the number of students enrolled in the private sector.”

Indeed, the tuition fees gap between both sectors and the stipends offered to students in the public sector is a serious challenge for private providers who want to recruit more students. Private institutions' tuition fees could be a challenge to students who come from low-income families. Without financial support from the Government, enrolment in private higher education institutions would be difficult, if not impossible, for them.

Providers of private higher education have been looking for some recognition from the Government that they are providing a crucial service in the field of higher education. The private sector feels it should be given more consideration by the Government. I heard a recurring note of irritation on this point. For example, a private college board member complained:

“We were regarded as outsiders, as an unwanted child.”

An administrator from a private college remarked:

“The Government shouldn't expand its public sector but, rather, support the private sector more, as the cost of students in private institutions is 50% lower than in the public sector. I have some worries that this support will not continue.”

There was a sense of frustration about this lack of financial support. The vice dean of a private college highlighted the private sector's frustration:

“In the KSA, there is yet no culture of endowment. The culture of alumni contributions to higher education institutions is still not there either. We have been working hard with the religious authorities who pronounce fatwas [religious judgements] that zakat [the Islamic obligation to give alms] can be used to encourage people to support private higher education institutions.”

A private college board member also remarked:

“We tried many times to get banks to help students. It's social participation. They could cut it from their zakat payment”.

It was not long after the Saudi Government permitted private higher education that it started to financially support the private sector. (Al-Dali & Al-Rayes, 2009). The

Government has been gradually responding to the financial challenges facing the sector. The first financial incentive the Government offered to the private sector was the leasing of government lands, which are owned by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, as well as other government authorities. This was approved by the Council of Ministers Decree No. 87, released on the 6th of April 2002 (MOHE, 2012b). The second form of financial support from the Government was soft loans to licensed private higher education institutions. Though this kind of financial incentive from the Government was available during the pilot study, none of the providers interviewed recognised this kind of support from the Government. This was a bit surprising until one of the interviewees (a faculty member from a private college) clarified the contradicting policies of the Government:

“Private providers are not eligible to receive loans from the Government unless they provide the Ministry of Finance with almost one third of the value of the loan. If we had the money, why would we then approach the Ministry in the first place?”

While the Saudi Government provides loans to private higher education institutions, there is as yet no student loan scheme available as in other countries. An administrator from the private sector emphasised:

“The infrastructure to support private colleges and universities is not yet there. For example, the banking system doesn’t provide loans for students.”

A board member of a private college observed:

“SAMA (The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency) could request banks to offer us low-interest loans--as a social responsibility. The MOHE could ask SAMA to do this.”

A faculty member was more emphatic in his comments:

“The Government should force banks to offer loans to students. Not all parents can afford their higher education. Student loan programmes have worked very well everywhere else. Why not here?”

In addition to the absence of student loans, private higher education in Saudi Arabia does not have access to other alternatives. Donations are another minor source of

income for private higher education institutions. Some private higher education institutions sought financial help from well-known wealthy businessmen through personal networking. Donated funds by the executives were then offered to students in the form of scholarships. However, charity foundations and for-profit institutions are not compatible. A dean from the private sector described the financial constraints facing his institution:

“...Our institution, being ‘for-profit,’ receives few donations from businessmen. The perception of profiteering from charitable donations has surfaced, to the detriment of the for-profit sector...”

It is worth noting that in Saudi Arabia, people are still not used to donating to educational institutions, people still have the perceptions that donations or Zakat –the religiously fixed portion of wealth-- should be spent on building mosques or on poor people, and that education is the Government’s responsibility.

What seems to have been increasing the frustration of the private sector is seeing the Government’s external scholarship programme, which sends thousands of students abroad. One of the interviewees, a former dean from a private college, commented:

“The Government is financially sponsoring students to study abroad in majors that we are offering...The Government might save more money if, rather, it sponsored students to go to private institutions.”

Indeed the government’s decision to send thousands of students abroad was not received well by providers of private higher education. At that time, private institutions were struggling to recruit students. The Government, possibly, succeeded in alleviating this anger from the private providers through its scholarship programme which will be discussed in the following section.

Internal Scholarships

Seven years after the inception of private higher education, the Ministry of Higher Education decreed the establishment of an internal scholarship programme allowing

students to enrol in private higher education institutions. (Decree No. 6304/MB of August 18th 2006.) This scholarship programme has five phases (Al-Dali & Al-Rayes; 2009). From 2006 to 2010, around 10,000 scholarships were granted to the amount of 326,571,000 Saudi Riyals. In the first phase, the number of scholarships that each institution was eligible for did not exceed 30% of the total enrolment (Al-Dali & Al-Rayes; 2009). The Ministry allocated certain amounts for each subject. This meant that, in many cases, the scholarship covered only part of the tuition fees and the student had to pay the rest. (MOHE, 2012b).

Two types of scholarships were offered: 1) full scholarships, which covered secondary school graduates who had “Excellent and very good” accumulated GPAs, and 2) partial scholarships which covered secondary school graduates with “good” accumulated GPAs. In addition to secondary school grades and the cumulative GPA, the scholarship programme required that disciplines that students were applying for had to be market-oriented. One would not expect this requirement for a private institution since the Government’s licensing rules already entail market orientation of all courses offered. These scholarships covered students already enrolled, as well as those to be enrolled in private institutions. However, newly applying students had to pass the standard examination needed for admission to public higher education institutions. Generally, this is not among the requirements for admission to private higher education institutions in the Kingdom. Only a few private institutions required this assessment for admission.

In 2010, the Ministry of Higher Education increased its support for scholarships to private higher education institutions to cover up to 50% of the total enrolment in the institution. Apparently, the Government scholarship programme induced trust in the private sector, as well as providing much needed financial relief. As one of the students commented:

“We used to fear that degrees from the private sector would not be recognised; but with Government scholarships being offered to students in private higher education institutions, that means that the Ministry is approving the sector.”

A faculty member at a private college confirmed that view:

“Government scholarships’ being made available to the private sector signifies trust in that sector.”

In agreement with what my interviewees said, I remember that, before the Government’s scholarship programme started, a major concern of new applicants was whether private higher education was approved by the Government or not. But with the scholarship programme, it is likely that Saudis realised that the Government would not offer this kind of financial support unless it was to improve a sector viewed favourably by the Government. In addition to the sense of trust that government scholarships provided for the private sector, they also helped to alleviate the financial burden on students, particularly students from low-income families who otherwise would not be able to enrol in this sector. A student applying to a private college remarked:

“I was in my fifth semester in a public university... but when I heard about the internal scholarship programme, I decided to come here (to a private college).”

Before the Government’s internal scholarship program, indirect financial support came in 2006 through the Government’s Human Resources Development Fund, which offered loans to students. However, support has been restricted to certain majors, such as banking, logistics, human resources management, and tourism. Increased public financial support is highly needed in the context of Saudi Arabia: financial resources available to the private sector are limited.

The effect of government support on student enrolment in private higher-education institutions has been discussed in the international literature. A study conducted by Tierney (1980) analysed data gathered on new students. He found that student aid has a great effect on student choice in attending either private or public schools. Astin and Inouye (1988), looked at the effect of public policy on private higher education institutions, specifically student aid policy. Zumeta (1996), also finds that with the variation among different states of USA, where he did his study, as to policies of private higher education, there was an obvious correlation between the policies. With the increase of student aid, there was an increase in enrolment in private higher education institutions, particularly of students from low-to-middle income families. These same patterns seem to be emerging in the Kingdom’s private higher education sector with

increased government financial support and--just as important--recognition of the value of these institutions.

It is the case that the public universities, facing increasing demand, have adopted more restrictive admission standards. This in turn has placed more demand on the private sector.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on the relationship between the private sector and the Government in the Saudi context. This relationship is of a complicated nature, as it evolves from one stage to another, changed by new policies and regulations. While private higher education in the KSA was initiated by the government rather than the private sector, the government was perceived as being a reluctant partner. Planning, implementation, and decision-making were hesitant and characterised by what has been called ‘experimental, trial and error approach’.

The Government’s stance towards the private sector changed from being reluctant about approving the private sector, to inviting the private sector to participate in higher education provision but with detailed regulations, to gradually supporting it financially. Overall, the Government plays a major role in the development of private higher education, for without its support of the private sector, higher education would still be entirely dominated by public institutions. From the perspective of regulations alone, Saudi Government may have appeared to be pro-active, as the Government appears more concerned about controlling the private sector than facilitating its development and integration into the higher education system. Licensing and accreditation requirements preceded the establishment of private institutions. On the other hand, the Government could be considered as reactive to the slow growth in the private sector by allowing profit-making private institutions to attract private investment and through providing scholarships to students in private institutions.

Chapter 11

Concluding Thoughts

Through this thesis, I intend to present my readers with a multi-faceted analysis that will help them better understand the role of the private sector in the higher education system, and also in the changing society of a modern Middle East country such as Saudi Arabia. I have examined the private higher education in Saudi Arabia from three perspectives: regional-historical, institutional and socio-political. This was in an attempt to answer my research questions:

- 1, What are the contributing factors behind the emergence and development of private higher education in the KSA ?
- 2, To what extent is the Saudi private higher education sector perceived to be distinct from the public sector?
- 3, What are the wider implications of private higher education for the higher education system and the country in general?

My thesis, accordingly, was organised into four Parts. Part I and II looked into the rise and early development of the private sector mainly from a historical angle. Part III examined the perceptions of the private sector among the different stakeholders involved - students, administrators, faculty members, policy makers and employers, and the extent to which the private sector addresses limitations in the public sector of higher education. Part IV explored the role of the private sector in a wider socio-political context, by looking at the use of English language in the sector as a symbolic interaction between the country and the outside world, and also the changing relationship between the sector and the central government.

In this concluding chapter, however, I would like to summarise my findings in a slightly different format for the avoidance of a dreary repetition of previous discussions. To do so, I go back to the title of this thesis and address the keywords one by one - *emergence*, *development*, and *perceptions* of private higher education in Saudi Arabia. I then go a step further in discussing some of the bigger issues that emerge from my previous chapters, such as social class, gender equity, globalisation, cultural identity, etc. These issues are explored in relationship to the debate of public goods versus private goods, or social benefits and private gains of higher education. I then return to an early assumption

regarding the role of private higher education - whether it provides more, better or different education. The thesis ends with my recommendations for various stakeholders of private higher education in Saudi Arabia. But before the summary of my findings, I would like to reflect upon the methodology of my empirical work, in particular its limitations.

Methodology and Limitations

There were no published works on the emergence of private higher education in Saudi Arabia and its implications. I therefore adopted a qualitative research design which I felt was particularly appropriate for the kind of study I was undertaking. The sector is so new that there is little understanding about its nature, and the extent to which it is different from the public sector. The nature and the distinctiveness of the private sector and the context in which both sectors exist are important things to consider while understanding the emergence of this new sector. Therefore the present study offers an opening for others to follow.

From the beginning, I understood that my work would be exploratory. The basic outlines of my study topic were barely known. I believed that by gathering and analysing the perceptions of a broad variety of stakeholders, including students, academic and administrative staff, employers, and government officials, I would be able to present a provisional picture of this field. My previous work as an administrator in a Saudi Arabian private college and my review of secondary literature on private higher education, as well as contemporary government documents, all contributed to the context of this research and the analysis of the data obtained.

More than one hundred interviews were conducted, which were subjected to detailed thematic analysis. The result is a mosaic of informative, nuanced, and sometimes surprising perceptions. That mosaic is multifaceted, and despite containing many common themes and sub-themes, it thus also contains some contradictory opinions, which are all one would expect of 'human truth'.

Undertaking such a large number of interviews involved a considerable organisation of resources as well as time. These interviews required transcribing into Arabic, then translating into English, prior to the thematic mapping process which was also very

time-intensive. As I was operating as a single researcher within the time frame of a PhD programme, resources were necessarily limited. The study sample was selected from one city only—Jeddah, involving four higher education institutions. Jeddah is representative because its higher education operates in a way which reflects the country as a whole.

Most of the students interviewed were business subjects. I chose this major to unify my sample and also because it was a subject common to all three of the private institutions which I surveyed. I did some interviews, however, with other majors for control purposes, but these did not reveal any significant difference in perception. However, in a possible future study, it might be that students in the subjects of health sciences, such as medicine, would produce different opinion. All medical classes are in English and admission standards are very high in the public sector. To make a valid comparison between the two sectors I need to choose subjects available to students in both sectors. Business subjects are among the few that are offered by both public and private sectors. It would thus be very useful to compare perceptions of quality in the health sciences in the public and private sectors.

While I intended not to compare the private colleges involved, it must be said that I have not noticed a significant difference in the impressions of people of different colleges. The only noted difference was in relation to extracurricular activities, which appeared to have more presence in one institution than the others. Also there were not substantial differences in the perceptions of male and female participants.

Another limitation in the study was that the difficulty for me to obtain access to current government officials, and much more so to get their perceptions on the record for my research. Obviously the research can much benefit from a richer source of personal perceptions of the key stakeholders of higher education. At the moment this remains extremely difficult especially for a female researcher as myself. Without a data input from the policy makers one can only speculate on the decisions and intentions, and make a consideration of important higher education policies and practices based on second hand data. Based on my personal experience and observation of government officials I suspect I would be able to gain more information beyond mere diplomatic answers and official accounts. Therefore, in order to account for this process of avoidance, future research using other sources such as published statements could be accessed.

A primary reason for adopting the research approach employed in the present study is because the researcher wanted to open the investigation of this field for wider study. This is the first study of private higher education in Saudi Arabia since it emerged about a decade ago. As there is no published research on this subject it is hoped that the present study can lead to further investigations, some of which may ask different questions and thus adopt different approaches. The exploratory, investigative approach adopted here was designed to broaden our awareness of how the emerging and expanding private higher education sector appears to those who are part of it. Generally speaking, even given the limitations I've outlined, I do believe the perceptions I've documented would be valuable focal points for subsequent research--both qualitative and quantitative.

Defining Private Higher Education in Saudi Arabia

In Chapter 2, I discussed the perspectives for understanding private Higher Education, including funding, ownership, orientation, functions and role, and governance. So what exactly counts as private higher education in Saudi Arabia? At this point, with all the analysis in previous chapter, it is perhaps easier for me to offer a clearer definition. The clearest distinctions between the private and the public sectors are the facts that - first, in Saudi Arabia, private institutions are those that are not owned by the government; and, second, private institutions charge tuition fees.

Private higher education in Saudi Arabia is not owned by individuals but rather by companies and non-for profit organisations. While many governments around the world still have restrictions on for-profit higher education institutions, in Saudi Arabia it was not too long after the private sector came into existence that the government waived this restriction. The government takes an equal stance in its relationship between for profit and non-for profit private higher education institutions. Both types of higher education institutions comply with government regulations and they both receive the same support from the government. The impact of institutional type on the performance and the seriousness of the institutions have not been investigated but it might worth further investigation.

Also, it is worth noticing that foreign ownership is still not permitted in private higher education in Saudi Arabia. This is consistent with the conservative tradition in the political economy of Saudi Arabia. It is still unclear whether, or when, the government will allow this form of ownership. However, if it is to be allowed, one may wonder how feasible it is for foreign providers to recruit qualified staff considering the existing private institutions are facing great difficulty in this regard. One may also be interested in the ways in which foreign ownership in private higher education affects the standard of educational provision, and leads to wider social changes.

While the private sector enjoys more flexibility and less bureaucracy in its daily management than in its public counterpart, there is tight control from the government. Such a tight control is manifested through a series of policies and regulations that favour government intervention and supervision. At the moment the intention of this tight control is still not entirely clear - whether the government is more concerned with the quality of educational provision in the private sector, or the possibilities that the private sector may act against the interests or preference of the government. The government is still uncertain in its stance towards the private sector in terms of policy making, implementation and financial support. My concern about government control over the private sector here is about the ways in which the private sector's innovation is affected. If the private sector is to take a bigger role in the Higher Education sector in Saudi Arabia, the sector should be given more flexibility in its governance.

Emergence

I now move on to summarise my main findings in this thesis. With regard to the emergence of private higher education, I explored the early rise and development of the private sector in Saudi Arabia. As has been seen, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia faces a unique combination of challenges—historical, cultural, social, demographic and economic. These challenges each have a direct impact on the development and call for a better higher education system. The relationship between the ruling family and the Wahbi movement has meant that religion has a profound effect on all aspects of Saudi life including education and economic development. Moreover, while the country has amassed great wealth from oil, developments in the country have been subject to the

unpredictable cycle of rising and falling oil prices. Pace of developments has been slower than the growth in demographics.

As my analysis in Part II shows, one of the greatest challenges facing Saudi Arabia's higher education sector is the gap between demand and supply. Findings suggest that the higher education system of the KSA is in need of private higher education, not as an elitist adjunct to a successful public higher education system, but as a necessary complementary element to a public system which not only lacks the capacity, but is also being challenged on many fronts. To some extent, one can argue that private higher education in Saudi Arabia has surged as a response to the public sector's failure to meet qualitative and quantitative demands on the sector. The higher education system barely expanded over a 30-year period from the 1960s to the end of the 20th Century that was marked during the same period by significant population growth, as Table 4 shows. This created a critical lack of capacity and eventually affected the quality of the sector. The quality of education and graduates has been another shortcoming of the public sector, resulting in high unemployment rates among university graduates.

Another underlying factor in the early rise of the private sector is the government's approval. As I mentioned in Chapter 10, no private higher education institutions existed before the Government approved the establishment of the first private college in 1998. Despite widespread recognition of the concerns relating to the public sector, it was only when the Government permitted the private sector to operate that it began to emerge. This confirms Levy's (2009, 2010, 2011) observations on the promotional role of the Government on the emergence of private higher education in the Middle East. In Saudi Arabia this decision followed significant pressure and encouragement from private investors who had for years been asking to develop a private sector within higher education. There was delay, indecision, resistance, denial--and lack of planning. Overall, there was a sense that the Government feared a loss of control. Also, regulations were very detailed from the beginning. The MOHE was given a supervisory role to ensure that private institutions complied with all regulations. Restrictive ownership requirements were set up. The academic programs were to be designed to meet labour market needs. New institutions must be licensed by the MOHE in order to operate. The requirements of the preliminary license are quite detailed and stringent.

Though it is still unclear why the government decided to allow the private sector to come into being, one would suspect that it was mainly due to the efforts of the private sector. The government appeared reluctant towards the introduction of the private sector, but perhaps it was becoming clearer to the government that the public sector was not entirely successful in higher education provision for the Saudi society. The private sector may have appeared as a reasonable choice for the government at the time. Furthermore, the global pressure was perhaps stronger than any resistance from the Government. Global pressures which coloured the need for higher quality and more relevant higher education perhaps proved to be stronger than any tendency in government circles to maintain the status quo. The world-wide proliferation of high quality higher education, particularly in neighbouring Arab countries, together with the advent of the knowledge economy, may have produced a compelling momentum towards the encouragement of the private provision of higher education. I will discuss this further in the following section.

Development

Two things seem to contribute to the development of the private sector of HE in the KSA, its distinctiveness and the government's changed stance towards the private sector. For the former, we have seen that the private sector is distinctive in a number of perspectives, which were discussed in Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9.

A leading selling-point for the promotion of the private sector, discussed in Chapter 9, has been its use of the medium of English instruction in contrast to Arabic-medium instruction in the public sector. The research identified that the use of the English medium was not just an important characteristic, but a defining one of the private sector, shared by all providers. It was also the reason why some young people chose private education, whereas others decided not to choose the private provision because they preferred to study in the Arabic medium.

The use of English is not simply a matter of linguistic fluency and capability but also signals and implies a change in course content and quality. The role English seems to play for these stakeholders is multifaceted, incorporating educational, economic, social, and political dimensions. Even the small number of interviewees who expressed

criticism of the use of English was clearly reacting to a powerful social reality. Another aspect of this difference is the perception that command of English assists in employability. English was perceived to have a high value as a necessary skill in a globalised economy. It was considered the most important job skill.

Despite the private sector's promoting of itself as offering this distinctiveness, it nevertheless faces challenges in maintaining its own recruitment of highly fluent English-language speakers to faculties. Providers of private higher education have difficulty finding qualified faculty. Recruiting non-Muslim or Western faculty is difficult because of the restrictive way of life in the Kingdom. Furthermore, there is also a lack of locally produced English-language texts, along with lecturers who understand both the UK/USA contexts and that which prevails in the KSA. Moreover, that access into the sector is limited by a student's ability and willingness to study in the English medium. A further concern is the extent to which the promotion of the use of the English medium can lead to a loss of a distinctively Arabic cultural identity to the work of a higher education institution. I will discuss this point further in a following section.

From the institutional perspective, the private sector is, first of all, distinctive in its admission policies, particularly the fact that it is more accessible for those who fail to get into the public system for reasons of academic requirements or national policies; and second, the provision of subjects that bear more relevance to a changing job market under the influence of a global economy.

Moreover, private institutions are perceived as distinct for their smaller class sizes and for the 'special attention' they give to their students, as discussed in Chapter 7. Student-teacher ratios were favourably commented on by both students and faculty academics. In private institutions, classes are smaller and students are given more 'special attention', which they value highly. Students are also able to make presentations in class, which is not the case in the public universities. Faculty find that smaller class sizes allow them to assign more demanding work which requires more time to grade. This appeared to have had a positive impact on the development of 'soft skills' in students and thus their employability. Moreover, the presence of extracurricular activities is another perceived distinction and selling point for private institutions in Saudi Arabia, with its implication for student development and graduate employability.

Furthermore, the private sector is also distinctive in the ways in which it prepares graduates for the job market. A linkage of higher education to the labour market is a key concern in a country with high levels of unemployment among its Saudi nationals. My

discussion in Chapter 8 suggests that Saudi private higher education is better linked to the labour market than the public sector, which also echoes global trends in private higher education as discussed by Levy (1986a, 2006b, 2009, 2010b) and Cao (2008). In addition to the use of the English language and the market-orientation of the majors offered, internships and practical learning are found to be other distinct practices for Saudi private higher education which are related to the labour market. The private Higher Education sector has managed to establish more effective networks for connections with the private sector in the market such as through career centres and events and activities hosted by the private institutions.

Last, but not least, the presence of extracurricular activities is another perceived distinction and selling point for private institutions in Saudi Arabia, with its implication for student development and graduate employability. All stakeholders perceived those activities as having a greater emphasis in the private sector. This included international field trips, sports, clubs, workshops, seminars and lectures. Graduates of private institutions are perceived to be better equipped with soft skills which are believed to be important for employers. Employers who were interviewed believed that extracurricular activities better prepared student graduates for the real world and helped to develop their personalities. Public sector faculty members noted the many bureaucratic limits on offering such activities in their schools. Private sector students valued the particular efforts made by their institutions to provide such activities. One third of the interviewees understood extracurricular activities to be valuable in developing personalities and skills. As a result, they felt themselves to be 'better rounded'. Student union activities and student elections in the private sector were also enthusiastically received. Some students felt that extracurricular activities could be improved, expressing a desire for more and wanting them to be more innovative. Private sector students reported that they developed greater self-confidence and the ability to 'present themselves' through extracurricular activities in their colleges.

The second underlying factor of the development of the Saudi private higher education is the changing attitude of the government. The analysis shows that the Government stance towards private higher education has changed from denial, to reluctance, to experiment and to partial support. I believe that the Government plays an important role in the development of private higher education in Saudi Arabia through the implementation of quality control policies. The National Commission for Academic

Assessment and Accreditation (NCAAA) was set up in 2004 as an independent body to further assess these institutions and to accredit them. Another contributing factor to the development of the private sector is the Government financial support to the private sector. Initially, the Government did lease land for these institutions. Soft loans were also offered but interviewees complained that private providers had to put up one third of the loan's value--which was too much. Moreover, the introduction of student scholarships to private institutions has led to a growth in the number of students enrolled in the sector, but so far no student loan programs have been made available by the Government or by the banking sector. There is as yet no culture of endowment as these institutions are still very new. Overall, the Government plays a significant role in the development of private higher education with its detailed regulations and its financial support.

Perceptions

Throughout my analysis in Part III and IV, I have presented the overall perceptions of the private sector. However, I am not suggesting that there were no variations among these perceptions. In this section, I would like to highlight some differences in the perceptions of various groups of stakeholders that can lead to further research. For the stakeholders, I refer to mainly three groups in the following discussion - students, faculty members and employers. I also examine the possible differences between the public and private sectors.

First, there was a disagreement over the choice of the private sector. Some view private higher education to be a place for low achievers while some see it as a place for a better quality of higher education provision. The question here is rather to what extent admission requirements affect the quality of higher education provision at private institutions - if students are enrolled at a lower requirement, to what extent can they catch up with a higher quality education provision? And how do we evaluate the quality of a given higher education institution - by its capacity in producing graduates who are professionally adequate or by its admission policies that favour applicants who are academically capable? It sounds somehow paradoxical, while the public sector is more selective in enrolment, the quality of education delivered is highly questionable. And also, the labour market appears to favour graduates from the private sector over those from the public sector. For this point, I tend to agree with Cross (1974, P.87) who

argues that “the quality and indeed success of HE depends on the fulfilment of the new task It is not to select those who will be successful but to make successful those who come ”.

Second, regarding the notion of ‘quality’ in higher education provision, students in both sectors favour certain practices in the private sector, such as small class size and special attention to individual students. But faculty members have different concerns - those in the private sector argue that students tend to misuse this ‘special attention’ by taking their ‘consumer rights’ for granted and making unreasonable demands. Here, we see an interesting phenomenon that is much related to the idea of ‘private good’. As Teixeira and Dill (2011) point out,

‘... higher education institutions are increasingly motivated to adopt an external orientation, often translated into a discourse calling for greater customer focus. This customer-orientation is often received with mistrust and perplexity’ (Teixeira & Dill, 2011, p. XV)

Students in the private sector, on the one hand, enjoy the educational experience of a higher standard, and on the other hand, seem to understand the educational process in more of a consumer-provider relationship. The private sector, hence, is faced with a dilemma - students are entitled to hold certain expectations of the educational ‘services’ but they should also not be understood as mere ‘consumers’. Students, in both public and private sectors, are after recipients of a particular form of education - they are to be educated while being ‘served’. How to achieve this balance between the roles of ‘educator’ and ‘service provider’ will be a demanding task for the private sector.

Third, regarding the teaching and learning of English in higher education, almost all stakeholders agree that English language skills are important for graduate employment, but students and faculty members in the private sector and also employers hold different opinions over the deficits of English language education. Students in the private sector complain that teachers are not entirely competent, while teachers tend to blame students for their lack of basic language skills, and employers are still not entirely satisfied with the English language competence of private institutions graduates even if they were better than public sector graduates. One must investigate this matter a bit further in order to better understand the cause of the problem. The private sector is capable of further improving its educational provision in English, but first, it must also

address this issue properly. If students are not adequately prepared, they should be requested to take longer training in academic English; if faculty members are not competent enough, the private sector should make greater efforts securing better teaching staff; if employers are demanding graduates of higher English language competence, the private sector can also involve them in curriculum design procedure in this regard.

Last, but not least, in a comparison between the private sector and international standards, students within the privates hold slightly different opinions - some regard the private sector as a desirable alternative to overseas studies, while those who are exposed to overseas education before believe that there is still a gap between the two. Here, those two groups hold different standards of quality of higher education. The former compare the private sector with its local public counterpart, while the latter use international standards. Also, employers are aware of this gap perceived by the latter group, as they tend to prefer overseas returners than local graduates from the private sector. This perhaps indicates that the private sector, though regarded as providing higher quality education than its local public sector, has a lot to catch up with to match international standards - it is after all a young sector in its early stage of development in various aspects.

The role of private higher education in the KSA, public or private good?

In this section, I intend to briefly discuss some contentious issues that emerged from my analysis in this thesis that bear wider social implications, such as social class, gender equity, and globalisation, etc. These issues are beyond the scope of the inquiry in this thesis. In this section, I therefore discuss their relevance to the Saudi context, and also suggest further questions for future studies.

There is no agreement over the extent to which higher education is a public or private good (see Teixeira & Dill, 2011). The situation varies greatly from country to country, from era to era. One key issue in this debate is the distribution of the cost of higher education - to what extent higher education should be understood as a public good and therefore paid for by the society (through tax, for instance) that benefits from an increase in the growth of professional personnel, knowledge and economy, or as a

private good and therefore paid for by individuals (through tuition fees) who most directly benefit from their participation in higher education. In a number of European countries such as France, higher education remains free for everyone (Windolf 1997). But in some other countries, higher education is increasingly regarded as a private good. For instance, in England, higher education was regarded as mainly a public good before a market philosophy prevailed - universities did not charge tuition fees and received stable funding from government (see Barr 1993 for instance). However, since 1998, the tuition fee has risen from a maximum of 1,000 pounds to a maximum of 9,000 pounds in 2012¹. Students are widely described as customers or consumers of higher education, and are, therefore, requested to share the cost. Higher education, accordingly, is increasingly regarded as a form of private good that is subject to certain rule and regulations of a market of educational credentials and experiences. The University of Exeter, for instance, has recently introduced some new policies and practices for its '9,000 pounds experience' campaign².

To complicate this debate even further, there are no universal definitions of either 'public good' or 'private good'. In a large number of higher education studies, the former mainly refers to social benefits of higher education such as citizenship, democratic values, the development of new knowledge (research), the training of highly qualified personnel (teaching), and the ethic function which implies social criticism, etc. The latter mainly refers to private gains through higher education participation such as professional skills, all-round personal development, social recognition, income rise, social mobility, etc.

At this point, I would like to discuss some issues that emerge from my previous discussions and tackle their implications in relation to this debate of public and private goods. I am not to discuss the role of the entire higher education system, but only focus on the private sector. In particular, I want to explore, apart from its most noticeable contribution to private gains such as a quality experience and employability, to what extent the private sector also contributes to wider social gains.

¹ see for instance this BBC report by Sean Coughlan, *Tuition fees set to rise next year*, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-18984938>, last accessed on 1st October, 2012.

² see Times Higher Education Supplement report by Rebecca Attwood *Exeter goes to the top of the cap*, available at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=415355>, last accessed on 1st October, 2012.

Private Higher Education and the Private Benefits

The private higher education sector in Saudi Arabia is perhaps more of a private good. This is evident from my previous discussions. In comparison with the free public sector, the private sector charges tuition fees for its 'quality educational provision'. University pedagogy is more student-centred, with each student having more 'special attention' from the teaching faculty; students are more exposed to extra-curricular activities designed to facilitate students' personal development; other services such as a 'careers centre' aim to maximise private gains of each student by helping with better employment opportunities; students are also given more power in other matters such as choices of tutors - as I mentioned previously, administrators in the private sector are more willing to accommodate student demands to change tutors.

For future studies, it will be interesting to explore the private gains of students in Saudi Arabia, either in the public or the private sector, or both, through their participation of higher education, in particular how students themselves interpret and understand these benefits.

Private Higher Education and the Public Benefits

One must be cautious in applying this discussion of public benefits to the Saudi context. To begin with, factors that have been widely discussed in existing literatures, such as citizenship and democratic values, are not readily applicable to the Saudi context. The kingdom is ruled by religious laws and has a very different political system than a modern democracy. To what extent these factors commonly used in Western settings can be applied to Saudi Arabia is open to further examination. Second, the private higher education sector is mainly teaching oriented, with now only one exception - the King Abdullah University for Science and Technology; research is not a main concern of the private sector at the moment.

Training the New Professionals

Perhaps, the most relevant factor in this regard is ‘the training of highly qualified personnel’. As my previous discussion shows, the private sector is believed to outperform the public sector in preparing its graduates for employment - students from the private sector are better equipped with English language skills, professional attitudes, work ethics and a global way of thinking, which could benefit the society and the economy in the long term.

A related issue is the policy of ‘Saudirisation’ that intends to reduce the country’s heavy reliance on foreign workers, and gradually replace them with Saudis. One may ask whether the private sector is acting against such policies by providing higher education opportunities to non-Saudi applicants. I want to point out that non-Saudis with a university degree and above only accounted for a small part of the total employment (5.56% in 2008³). The majority of the non-Saudi workers are without any qualifications or with only primary education (68.7% of the total employment of non-Saudis in 2008⁴), and are therefore excluded from the competition for high end jobs in the market. Though the exact statistic is not available at the moment, one may conclude that the proportion of non-Saudi graduates from the private sector in the job market is perhaps minimal. In other words, even if the private sector provides educational opportunities to non-Saudi students, they account for so small a proportion of the total employment as to raise no concern for the general “Saudiaisation” process.

However, the ratio of foreign workers in the private sector is a different matter. It appears that foreign faculty is the dominant group in private higher education institutions. Statistics from 2009 show that out of 1,537 employees in the private sector, 1,186 are non-Saudis - that is 77%. In comparison, in the public sector, non-Saudis account for 35.5% of the total employment⁵. Apparently, the ratio of non-Saudi workers is much higher in the private higher education. However, it is not clear to what extent the private sector will be the target of the “Saudirisation” policies.

³ based on statistics provided by Central Department of Statistics and Information, and Ministry of Economy and Planning, Saudi Arabia in <http://www.mep.gov.sa/inetforms/article/Download.jsp;jsessionid=C20A958DA9ABA3F998B290892B7B9679.alfa?Download.ObjectID=218>, last accessed on 21st September, 2013.

⁴ based on the same statistics as above

⁵ based on statistics provided by Ministry of Higher Education, 2009

Social Class and Educational Equity

In the tradition of sociology of education, one of the most debated issue about the role of the higher education sector in social mobility. For instance, in the United States, private universities such as Harvard and Yale are traditionally associated with social class. They charge higher tuition fees than their public counterparts, and attract students from privileged family backgrounds. This phenomenon has been studied widely in both quantitative and qualitative studies. Young's discussion of 'education-based meritocracy' (see Young 2000 for instance), Bourdieu's theory of 'cultural reproduction' (Bourdieu and Passeron 2000), Ball's research on parental choices of education (Ball, Davies et al. 2002), and many other quantitative research on the contribution of one's family background on one's chances in quality education (see Goldthorpe, Llewellyn et al. 1980; Egerton and Halsey 1993; Hatcher 1998 for instance), all intend to reveal or better understand the relationship between private (higher) education, educational elitism and social class. A large number of studies argue that social class, measured by family income or parent education, etc., has a positive impact on children's chance in quality education, and in the case of higher education, the elite sector (private universities/colleges in the United States, and Oxbridge in the United Kingdom for instance). It would appear that the access to the elite higher education sector plays an important role in one's social mobility, whether it is to achieve upward mobility or to maintain family social privilege.

Looking back at the private sector in Saudi Arabia, one may wonder whether it will, following the footsteps of the American counterparts, become the elite sector of higher education in the near future. Although the sector is at its early stage of development, some of its practices tend to suggest its strategic vision - its relatively high tuition fee, its closer link to the global economy, and its focus on the quality of educational provision. The sector is already attracting students from wealthy family backgrounds, though it remains unclear who exactly these students are by the usual sociological measurements, such as their parental occupation and education, family income, etc.. Or perhaps, considering the socio-political hierarchy of Saudi Arabia (the substantial number of royal family members), one is also curious about the role of the private sector in producing a new social group, if not a class, in the country's slow but gradual socio-economic transition.

At this moment, there are a number of questions regarding the future development of the private higher education sector in Saudi Arabia that deserve our attention: Will the private sector play a significant role in producing new social and/or intellectual elites of Saudi Arabia who are exposed to quality higher education and subject to a global mentality? Or will the private sector be crucial to social mobility of the domestic social elites? Or rather perhaps, will the private sector become the elite sector in Saudi Arabia in the near future, or become instead the incubator of the new middle class? The answers to these questions are far from being clear at this moment. It is for future studies to investigate.

Therefore, it is perhaps early to discuss the impact of private higher education on social class in Saudi Arabia, as the country is yet to see a clearer stratification among social classes by the standards used in most European or American studies. Before further studies identify the shape of social classes in Saudi Arabia, and the factors that can be used to identify one social class from another, there is not much we can say about this issue at the moment.

On the other hand, there is evidence of a positive impact on educational equity. The private sector in Saudi Arabia has managed to provide access to those who are otherwise denied from higher education, in particular the non-Saudis. As my previous discussion indicates, the public sector only accepts Saudi students, and students of foreign nationalities were once forced to leave the countries for access to higher education before the private sector came into existence. Also, the private sector has been more willing to accommodate demands of female students in terms of the subjects of studies available. This will be further discussed in the following section.

Nonetheless, one should not overlook the fact that relatively high tuition fees are charged by the private institutions. This implies that the private sector is mainly accessible for students from the affluent family background. Those who are less financially capable can only resort to a limited number of scholarships, or choose the public sector instead. To what extent the private sector will be dominated by the socially privileged in Saudi Arabia remains unclear at the moment.

Gender Equity

Gender equity is among the most discussed issues in internal news magazines such as Time, Newsweek, The Economist, etc. and regional studies of the Middle East, Saudi Arabia being no exception⁶. As an Islamic state, Saudi Arabia is subject to a long history and tradition of gender segregation. However, I do not wish to engage in a discussion of the legitimacy of this history and tradition at this moment, as it is a complicated issue that involves many factors such as religious belief, war history and social convention. I will limit my discussion to the role of the private higher education sector in gender equity in Saudi Arabia.

As my previous discussion has shown, the private higher education sector has introduced a number of practices that favour gender equity, such as new subjects of studies that suit female students. These subjects will, slowly but surely, help their female graduates to step into a wider spectrum of professions. The private sector appears to be more flexible than its public counterpart in accommodating the demands of female students, but in an Islamic state such as Saudi Arabia, the private sector needs to tread carefully - it needs to cautiously test the social acceptance of these changes and fit the general pace of socio-cultural reforms. The relationship between the new practices of the private higher education sector and wider social changes is unclear - whether the private sector is mainly echoing the social changes that are already taking place, or the private sector is leading social changes, or the innovations of the private sector are gathering momentum for wider social changes to come. But one message is clear; the private sector is making a positive contribution to gender equity by providing female students with wider access to higher education and new professions in the job markets.

The recent years have witnessed other new practices in private institutions in Saudi Arabia. For instance, the King Abdullah University for Science and Technology recently became the country's first mixed-gender university. Opened in September 2009, this

⁶ see for instance <http://www.economist.com/node/21557327>, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2187072/Saudi-Arabia-Women-city-planned-allow-more-females-pursue-career.html>, <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2011-09-26/king-abdullah-gives-saudi-women-right-to-vote-for-first-time.html>, last accessed on 1st October, 2012.

private university is located near Jeddah, and is designed to produce Saudi scientists⁷. Only in this university can male and female students mix. However, this new practice of 'co-education' was not without strong opposition, and the university was once at the heart of debates between liberal and conservative scholars in the country. This is yet another example of how social changes can only happen at a small scale and a slow pace in an Islamic state such as Saudi Arabia. It remains unclear for how long this practice can continue, or whether it will be adopted by other institutions in the future.

There is one more issue to be taken into account in this discussion. One may easily take for granted that gender equity can be measured by certain universal standards, such as education and occupation. But I would argue, for an Islamic society such as Saudi Arabia, some new standards or measurements need to be developed. These standards or measurements must be sensitive to local culture and history, and must not blindly follow any existing practices and procedures of other countries. Future studies in this regard should pay attention to this point. Furthermore, one should also be aware of some challenges, if not negative impacts, of this process of greater gender equity on the Saudi society. For this, I would like to add some personal observations. In some of the private institutions, students are encouraged to develop their own personalities through classroom teaching and extra-curricular activities, and some students, especially females, are becoming more 'ambitious'. I am aware that this word has a positive meaning in the English language, but it may not be so in the Saudi context - we are nonetheless talking about a society that has traditionally associated male members with 'ambitious' characters, not females. For everyone involved in this debate of gender equity in Saudi Arabia, I would like to remind them of this point.

Another interesting point here is about the government stance toward gender policies and practices in the private sector. Evidently, the private sector enjoys more flexibility and freedom in this regard. Some novel practices such as co-education of male and females students are first implemented in private institutions. One would speculate that the government is using the private sector as a testing field for controversial issues - if there is little resistance in the general society, the government can gradually introduce these new policies and practices to the public sector.

⁷ please see <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2009/10/05/king-abdullah-slaps-down-saudi-cleric-critical-of-co-ed-university/> and <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2009/10/01/saudi-cleric-to-kings-university-dont-teach-evolution-mix-sexes/> for full stories.

Cultural Identity at the time of Globalisation

From the early history of this relatively young kingdom, Saudi Arabia was subject to a certain degree of foreign presence in its social, political, and economic policies and practices. However, as the heart of Islamic civilization, Saudi Arabia has also been subject to strong religious traditions. The debates about foreign presence, or in many cases, 'intervention' or 'invasion', and the preservation of Islamic cultural identities have never ceased. In her study 'Changed Identities', Yamani (2005) focuses on this debate in the discourse of 'globalisation', and explores the ways in which young Saudis understand their relationship with the Islamic culture they grow up in, and with the global market and mentality at their doors. The image is a complicated one, but a large number of participants in her study show concern over the loss of their own cultural identities in the waves of globalisation, or as some argue, 'westernisation'. This was the reason why I investigated the issue of 'the use of the English language as medium of instruction' in this thesis. The use of English is not only a pedagogical choice, or a strategic decision of the private sector itself, but a symbolic interaction between a global economy and a unique regional culture.

One may wonder what role the private sector is playing in this regard. Does the private sector intend to initiate wider social changes through this particular practice? Or does the private sector only respond to a growing market demand of labour force with sufficient English language skills? What is the private sector's stance in the interaction between globalisation and local culture? Does it favour a global mentality or a unique cultural identity for the future generations of Saudi Arabia? To what extent is the private sector to blame for a loss of cultural identity in an Islamic society such as Saudi Arabia?

I do not believe there are simply answers to these questions. First of all, one must distinguish between 'intention' and 'effect'. The private sector perhaps does not intend to bring wider social changes through its educational innovations, but the effects of these innovations may include socio-cultural changes. Second, the private sector, by introducing new subjects, curricular materials, and ways of thinking, is making a positive contribution to a balance between a globalising world and a regional culture. One cannot protect one's cultural identity simply by keeping the globalising world out of the door. Rather, one must first fully understand the nature and context of globalisation, and also

reflect upon one's own culture, before one can set out to make plans for cultural preservation.

To make some more practical suggestions, I would urge the private sector to develop its own 'organic' curriculum as soon as possible, a curriculum that is based on the Saudi context, with inputs from local intellectuals, faculty and students, a curriculum that addresses important social, cultural and political issues and demands. I would also advise the private sector to further develop its own standards of 'quality higher education' that includes a wider spectrum of factors than the use of international curricular materials or the presence of foreign faculty. In other words, the private sector must develop its own 'cultural identity' as well.

A final point before I move on to the next section - one should also not over-estimate the impact of globalisation on Saudi higher education in general. Apart from the use of English in the private sector, there are few signs of globalisation in the country's higher education system. Up till now, no international institutions are allowed to have their campuses in Saudi Arabia, and hardly any online foreign degrees are recognised by the government; such programs are therefore not covered by the scholarship programmes. The influence of globalisation is yet to be further investigated.

Understanding Private Higher Education in Saudi Arabia- More? Better? Different?

To facilitate a better understanding of private Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, I am now going back to Geiger's distinctions between 'more', 'better' and 'different' as presented in Chapter 2, with reference to the findings from my analysis in the three Parts.

Data strongly suggest that the surge of private higher education in Saudi Arabia is a response to the public sector's failure to meet the demand for 'more', 'different' and 'better' higher education. As the public sector is falling short of absorbing the demand for higher education, this suggests that one of the reasons why Saudi private higher education has emerged was to provide 'more' access to higher education. The number of public universities has not increased in proportion to population growth.

Demands for higher education remain at higher levels than the sector can meet. Arab (2007) has projected that with the current trends, by 2035 67.2 % of students seeking admission into higher education will not be absorbed. Should this fact materialise, there will be a real crisis of demand. There is unquestionably a 'more' role for private higher education to fill.

The private sector, with its small share of total enrolment (3.49 %) is not serving a capacity building function at present. In 2007, Arab (p. 414) indicated that the Saudi Arabian private higher education sector failed to meet its absorptive capacity, and he called for an expansion. In the following half-decade this remains to be the case, despite some growth. His study recommended an ambitious plan of opening between 122 and 244 new private colleges by 2030 (2007, p. 414). Therefore the option of expanding the private higher education sector must remain under consideration, especially since expansion has not been happening at a sufficient rate through the public sector.

Geiger's category of 'more' was most typically associated with countries with a small public higher education sector, which have restrictive admission standards. This does not accurately describe the entire situation which prevails in Saudi Arabia. The number of public universities has not increased in proportion to population growth since then. As a result of this widening gap in demand, the public universities have become increasingly selective, taking those with the highest GPAs and thus in effect becoming

elite institutions. So, there is unquestionably a 'more' role for private higher education to fill.

As was noted in Chapter 2, Geiger's category of 'better' is a complex one to apply to the Saudi Arabian private sector, because of the lack of credible and objective data concerning the relative output and standards between comparable private and public higher education institutions and courses.

Irrespective of this lack of evidence, the majority of stakeholders interviewed in this study gave strong indications that, in their view, the private sector was providing something they viewed to be better. They highlighted the prevalence of the English medium, access to better educational resources, and better quality of some teaching, while class sizes were smaller and students were given more personal attention, and more majors were offered for more students who could not obtain them in the public sector.

There have been perceptions that private institutions are there for the children of the wealthy elite who achieved low high school grades and thus could not gain admission into competitive public universities. Initially, private institutions were less selective in their admissions because of the difficulty in attracting students to new colleges of a kind which had never existed before. But as these institutions have gradually proved their worth and have become better known, and as government scholarship support has increased, the private colleges are becoming more selective. It should be noted that students who receive these government scholarships must meet the same high academic standards as Saudi Arabian citizens who study abroad on scholarships. It remains to be seen how well the private institutions will do in terms of academic performance. We must await further comparative evaluation between the sectors.

The criteria used by Geiger to define 'better' arose from qualities within USA universities. These can, therefore, not be translated uncritically into a discourse focused upon realities in Saudi Arabia. One example of this was the research-rich focus within a university like Harvard, which places it above almost all others in terms of assessed quality. Such a criterion cannot be used to distinguish between public and private sectors in Saudi Arabia, as the private sector is still mainly teaching oriented.

Another broad area of private higher education which should be placed in Geiger's category of 'better' are the various activities which help to link students with the labour

market, a key point in a country with high levels of unemployment among Saudi Arabian nationals. Again, English instruction is very highly valued by employers. Extracurricular activities in the private sector are perceived to be positive in their effects on personal development in relation to students' self-confidence, their ability to communicate, to present themselves, and to their level of experience. Career centres, career days, practical learning in the classroom, and internships are all taken to be much better in the private sector—more emphasis with more resources—than in the public sector. These are seen by students, graduates, and employers alike as preparing students for work and for connecting them to the employers who hire them. While more needs to be done to further improve these activities, they represent a positive direction for these new private institutions.

The last of Geiger's three categories to address is 'different'. The fact that private higher education is seen to be 'better' implies that it is 'different'. However, this is unlike some other countries where private higher education is considered to be 'different' by meeting the demand of cultural or religious groups which the public sector fails to meet. In Saudi Arabia, private higher education is 'different' in its use of the English language, educational resources, smaller class sizes, and the majors and degree programmes offered. Private institutions are also 'different' links to a key aspect of the private sector, that of access. Private institutions admit the children of Saudi Arabia's large expatriate population, women who could not find degree programmes in the public universities, and students with lower high school grades. They also admit students who may not be underachievers but are simply not ranked at the top of their cohort, and thus fail to access courses for which only small numbers are admitted in public universities. For all such social groups, private colleges and universities offer the opportunity for a higher education. The greater access available to a more diverse student population again presents a marked difference. Although private higher education colleges may not make a public point about saying so, they operate open enrolment policies, accepting anyone from any background. The institutions are, therefore, different from public sector colleges, which are required to operate under fairly strict religious guidance and control.

Another sense in which Geiger used the category 'different' arises from simply not being the norm -the public. As public sector universities became more characterised by admissions based upon merit in Saudi Arabia, many from higher socio-economic backgrounds looked for alternative institutions which offered their children the

opportunity to be educated together in different institutions and thus avoid the social mixing which was inevitable in public universities. Private higher education in Saudi Arabia is thus being 'different'.

The Saudi private sector echoes global trends in its role of expanding access to higher education, in teaching taking priority over research (Altbach, 1999, 2009; Levy, 1986a, 2006, 2008, 2011), and in considering graduates' employability and the market needs (Levy, 1986a, 2006b; Cao, 2008). The private sector has the possibility of providing better quality education than is provided in the public sector, but time will tell whether this really is the case. Therefore private higher education has emerged in Saudi Arabia to address the demands which the public sector has fallen short of addressing. The demands are not limited to the capacity of the sector, but are also for a different quality of education, new professions, and the need for better quality graduates. The private sector of higher education has the tools to provide different and better education, but still faces some challenges which might hinder its success.

Looking to the Future: Concerns and Recommendations

In this final section of the thesis, I would like to express my concerns about the private higher education sector and make some recommendations to various perspectives and stakeholders of private higher education in Saudi Arabia.

Teaching, Learning and Research

It is clear that the use of English as the medium of instruction, with the goal of producing fluent graduates, is very important to all stakeholders. It is seen as an essential factor in employability and as the gateway to the global economy. It is also linked to access to high quality publications and software, as well as to majors in the sciences. Therefore, further emphasis should be placed on English-language skills at the secondary education level, both public and private. Additionally, greater emphasis should be placed on enhancing the English skills of teachers in higher education. The private sector should invest more in developing its own high-quality teachers, rather than 'borrowing' from the public sector. This will require higher pay for teachers. While emphasising English, the private sector must make a balance with cultural traditions: Arabic instruction should not be given lesser importance in secondary education as it now sometimes is. More majors should be made available, especially in those specialties most needed by the labour market, such as medicine, engineering, and the sciences.

Practical learning is very well received by students and should be developed and expanded. Internships are also greatly valued by students. More of them should be made available, which will require coordination with the labour market. Private institutions should, however, be clearer about what they want from employers. Extracurricular activities also receive very favourable responses from students and employers as a means of both personal development and better preparation for the job market, which will help students in developing sound personal qualities for their future employment. Punctuality, attitudes, and work habits should be addressed in course work, practical learning classes, or in workshops or seminars offered by school career centres. Early job success may depend on these simple factors.

Private higher education institutions in the KSA echo the global trend in focusing on teaching. With the exception of the recently established King Abdullah University, they do not have many links with research. Research is to varying degrees an important function of public higher education in many countries. This is not so in the KSA. Public universities' dedication to research is weak. A serious effort should be applied to correct the situation, for the country to be able to compete in an era of knowledge economy. The private sector should be encouraged through incentives to participate in research. In this it is important for the country to make use of 'brain power' wherever it might be found.

Governance, Collaboration and Funding

An independent body should be formed by those institutions to represent their collective interests with the Government and as a forum for information exchange. There is also a great wealth of information on the experience of private higher education in the rest of the world, which would be useful to those institutions now emerging in the country.

More collaboration between private universities is needed to cope with challenges such as faculty recruitment. A concept like that of independent colleges in the USA would be beneficial. The MOHE has a body which deals with private institutions, but these institutions might benefit more if they also have a body which can liaise with the Government as a whole, especially in relation to challenges such as shortages of faculty and instructors.

Private institutions should continuously assess their contribution and benchmark themselves against other reputable higher education institutions. Some private stakeholders in the Kingdom may be content with comparing their institutions with the public sector, but they would be found wanting when judged with international standards. The Government might want to consider strategies other than quality assurance mechanisms, to enhance quality, e.g. by allowing the establishment of branches of reputable international universities to create a competitive market in higher education and thus raise standards.

Private institutions need to consider entrepreneurial activities to generate funds which would allow them to prosper with or without government financial support. With rising oil prices and healthy budgetary surpluses, the Saudi Government could easily continue to support the private higher education sector. The challenge to the sector's financial stability would be acute, should the State face financial challenges of its own and seek to resort to austerity measures. The private sector will then have to seek other ways of balancing the books.

Graduates' Employment

In term of the labour market, there is at present inadequate basic data about what jobs are available in the country, in what numbers and what skills they require. Research should be undertaken to gather this information and to make it widely available and up to date, as job trends are ever changing in a rapidly developing economy. The job skill most often mentioned by employers—English fluency—needs critical examination. Is this a necessary job skill across the globe or is it something many employers seek for prestige, or in the sense that graduates who speak English are smarter? How much English is really needed and for which jobs? The answer to those simple questions would significantly impact upon educational policy. There is no doubt that English is required for some jobs in international business and finance, but the job skills of non-English-speaking Saudi Arabians should not be overlooked either.

As noted, internships are held in high esteem by students. But it appears that many employers are not ready for them yet. Ensuring that the training period is longer (six months) seems to give employers greater incentive to train, trust, and eventually hire graduates whom they know from intern positions. More structure seems to be needed for these internship programmes. This would require greater communication between the labour market and private institutions. Employers find career centres and career days to be useful for contacting and recruiting students, so those centres should be well funded. In particular, female students have difficulty in finding workplaces for their internships and employment. Employers should make increased efforts to train them. They are a vital and underused human resource for the Kingdom and are currently moving through the education system in greater numbers than males.

The Role of Government

With regard to the role of the Government, it has been a tentative and inconsistent force in recognising the private higher education sector. A number of stakeholders expressed their frustration that the Government did not understand the private sector as a partner in meeting the country's educational needs. Financially, the Government has increased the amount of scholarships in the private sector to cover up to 50 % of students enrolled. Not all of these scholarships pay full tuition costs, despite the high academic standards which students must meet to receive them. In fact, those standards are the same required of Saudi students who study abroad. In contrast, the Government pays all of the tuition and a monthly stipend to public sector students, so there is hardly a level playing field between the two sectors. A further question from some stakeholders was, why there are so many subsidies for Saudi Arabian students to study abroad (at greater cost) when they could be educated in their own country through an expanded private sector?

The Government could provide greater support to the private sector by leasing more government land for campuses. Soft loans could be offered. The Government could also take a direct role in providing low-interest student loans, or at least put pressure on the banking sector to do so. The very heavy subsidies given to the public higher education system may not be the best use of the nation's wealth. At the very least, if the two sectors were put on a level playing field, a competitive education market would exist which would benefit both sectors and would place a premium on the quality of results: students would attend the universities they thought were the best for them. This has been the experience in many other countries with 'parallel' systems.

The Government should encourage incentives of the private sector to develop new universities outside the largest cities. This could involve the leasing of government lands, loans, subsidies, customs exemptions, and reduced visa fees. Private higher education could be encouraged by changes in the Government's current ownership requirements. Foreign ownership should be permitted. Additionally, the Government should allow branches of international universities to be established in the Kingdom (as has been recently happening with its Gulf neighbours). This would provide high-quality standards and create greater competition.

The Ministry of Labour has more to accomplish to assess the specific needs of the labour market regarding university graduates' skills and qualifications. Still there is little

basic information about this critical area. It has been suggested by administrators in the private sector that the MOHE should coordinate between the Ministries of Labour and Planning and the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) as higher education policies and budgeting are currently divided between them, which results in delay, confusion, and inaction. No one wants to take the initiative to coordinate policy. More staff is needed within the MOHE, which is knowledgeable about private higher education. A recommendation has been made to appoint a Deputy Minister for Private Higher Education, someone specifically focused on that sector and with knowledge of its operations and needs.

The licensing process should be clarified, streamlined, and made to operate in a timely, predictable manner. For example, after eight years in existence, the NCAAA waited until July 2012 to accredit the first three private institutions. There should also be greater flexibility in applying regulations, as not all private higher education is the same. Again, the public sector universities are not subjected to these time-consuming and costly requirements. Although they are examined by the NCAAA for quality, the evaluations which result seem not to affect public university budgets. Those budgets should at the very least be performance-based.

The Government may want to consider other forms of partnership with the private sector, which are not limited to financial support, but rather offer collaboration at management level and the sharing of physical resources. There should be less sensitivity between the two sectors of higher education. The Government might want to consider partnerships between public and private institutions, so as to reduce some of the challenges facing them and ensure the continuity of a successful private sector. Coordination and cooperation between the public and the private sectors should encompass academic programmes and information-exchange in all areas.

The MOHE might want to expand the ministerial body in charge of private higher education and staff it with capable individuals to deal with the private sector. Staff within the MOHE whose work methods and culture may have worked well for the public sector need to be complemented by individuals who are in tune with the particular needs and problems of the private sector. It was incongruous to expect individuals steeped in the culture of serving the public sector of education to be able to succeed in planning and guiding the private sector.

At this point, I now end my discussion here with a hope that my research will contribute to a better understanding of private higher education in Saudi Arabia, and of the change and challenges faced by this modern Middle East country.

Appendices

Appendix (1): Partial list of New Universities and Colleges in the Gulf

Name and Date of Founding	Location
Gulf Centre For University Education - 1992	Kuwait
University of Wollongoing In Dubai - 1993	Dubai, United Arab Emirates
American University, Dubai - 1995	Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Majan University - 1995	Oman
Caledonian College of Engineering - 1996	Oman
Modern College of Business and Science- 1996	Oman
Muscat Colloge - 1996	Oman
Dubai Polytechnic - 1997	Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Univeristy of Sharjah - 1997	Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
American University of Sharjah - 1997	Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
Zayed University - 1998	United Arab Emirates
Mazoon University- 199	Oman
Ittihad University - 1999	Ras Al Kahimaj, United Arab Emirates
AlZahra Colloege For womed	Oman
Australion University of Kuwait - 2000	Kuwait
Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilanie - 2000	Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Sohar Uninversity -2000	Oman
Oman Medical College - 2001	Oman
Gulf Ubiversity, Bahrain -2001	Bahrain
Gulf University, Bahrain - 2001	Bahrain
Preston University, Ajman - 2001	Ajman, United Arab Emirates
Sur University College - 2001	Oman
Waljat College of Applied Sciences - 2001	Oman
Arab Open University - 1997	Saudia Arabia, Oman, Bahrain
Middle East College of Information Technology - 2002	Oman
Weston Reserve University - 2003	Kuwait
Carnegie Mellon, Qatar Campus - 2003	Qatar
Al Buraimi College - 2003	Oman
Dhofar University - 2004	Oman
Nizwa University - 2004	Oman
Royal University for Women - 2004	Bahrain
American University of Kuwait - 2004	Kuwait
British University in Dubai - 2004	Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Scientific College of Design - 2004	Oman
Oman College of Management and Technology - 2004	Oman
Gulf College - 2004	Oman
Middlesex University, Dubai Campus - 2005	Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Georgetown University, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Qatar -2006	Qatar
Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar - 2006	Qatar
Virginia Commonwealth University, Qatar - 2006	Qatar

Bayan College - 2006	Oman
Oman Dental College - 2006	Oman
Box Hill College - 2007	Kuwait
Texas A&M University at Qatar - 2007	Qatar
Middlesex University, Dubai - 2007	Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Herriot-Watt University, Dubai - 2007	Dubai, United Arab Emirates
American College of the Emirates - 2007	???
George Mason University - 2007	Ras Al Kahimaj, United Arab Emirates
Hult International Business School - 2007	Dubai, United Arab Emirates
European University College Brussels, Dubai--??	Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Islamic Azad University, Dubai--??	Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Mahatma Gandhi University, Dubai	Dubai, United Arab Emirates
St. Petersburg University of Engineering and Economics	Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology	Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Source Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges, Higher Education Institutions in the Sultanate of Oman (Muscat:2007). Various websites of universities and college. Shafeeq Ghabra and Margreet Arnold, "Study the American Way: An Assessment of American-Style Higher Education in Arab Countries" The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus #71, June 2007. (as cited in Willoughby, 2008, p.33)

Appendix(2): New Universities and Their Affiliations

Name and Country	Date Founded	Typr Alliance	of Partner	Other Details
Gulf Centre for University Education Kuwait	1992	Symbolic Association	Madurai	
			Kamaraj University	
			Tamil Nadu	
			Annamalal University	
			Tamil Nadu Indira Gandhi National Open University	
			New Delhi	
University of Wollongong in Dubai	1993	Branch CampusL Formal Supervision	University of Wollongong	
American University of Dubai	1995	Branch Campus	American Intercontinental University	Headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia
Majan College Oman	1995	Formal Supervision	University of Bedfordshire University of Leeds	Associated with Oman Chamber of Commerce
Caledonian College of Engineering	1996	Formal Supervision	Glasgow Caledonian University	
Modern College of Business and Science	1996	Symbolic Association	University of Missouri, St.	
			Louis University of Bond	
			Australia University of Exeter	
Muscat College	1996	Formal Supervision	University of Sterling Scottish Qualifications Authority	
Dubai Polytechnic UAE	1997	Formal Supervision	University of Hull	Founded by Dubai Chamber of Commerce
University of Sharjah Uae	1997	Symbolic Association	University of California-San Diego University	Importance of Links Probably varies from programme to program
			University of Jordan	
			University of Arizona	
			American University of Beirut	
			University of Exeter International Islamic University	

			Malaysia Monash University: Victorian College of Pharmacy	
			University of Adelaide	
American University of Sharjah UAE	1997	Sub-Contracting Partnership Formal Endorsement	American University of Texas A & M Accrediting by Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Universities	American University provides Major administrative staff
Zayed University UAE	1998	Formal Endorsement	Accepted for candidacy by Leading accrediting association	Founded to provide education for national womed
Mazoon College Oman	1999	Symbolic Association	University of Missouri, Rolla Banasthali Vidyapiyh, Jaipur, India	Mazoon College Oman
AlZahra College for Women	1999	Symbolic Association	Al Ahlia University, Jordan	
Birla Institute of Science and Technology Pilani	2000	Branch Campus	Birla Institute of Scince and Technology Pilani, India	Undergraduate Engineering Programmes
Sohar University	2000	Symbolic Association	University Of Queensland (Australia) Mutah University (Jordan)	
Oman Medical College	2001	Formal Supervision	West Virginia University	Initiated by Dr. Mohammed Ali, Managing Director of Galfar Group
Gulf University, Bahrain	2001	Symbolic Association	University of London	
			University of Leicester	
			Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada	
			American University in Cairo	
Perston University, Ajman, UAE	2001	Branch Campus	Preston University	Privately owned, for profit corporation incorporated in Alabama
Sur University College	2001	Symbolic Association	Bond University (Australia)	
Walijat College of Applied Science	2001	Symbolic Association	Birla Institute of Technology (India)	

Arab Open University	2002	Formal Supervision	United Kingdom Open University	
Middle East College of Technology Oman	2002	Formal Supervision	Coventry University	
Weston Reserve University Kuwait	2003	Branch Campus		
Carnegie Mellon Qatar Campus		Branch Campus	Carnegie Mellon University	
Al Buraimi College	2003			
Dhofar University Oman	2004	Formal Supervision	American University of Beirut	
Nizwa University	2004	Symbolic Association	Sultan Qaboos University	
			The Jordian University	
			Oregon State University	
			Leipzig University	
			University of Exeter	
			University of Reading	
			University of Al Garve	
			University Of Porto	
Royal University for Women Bahrain	2004			
American University of Kuwait	2004	Formal Supervision	Dartmouth College	For profit institution Head of Board of Trustees is Shaikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah
British University in Dubai UAE	2004	Formal Supervision	University of Edinburgh	Offers Masters Programmes
			University of Manchester	Not for profit University
			University of Birmingham Cardiff	Founding donors are Al Maktoum Foundation
			University Cass Business School of City	Dubai Development and Investment Authority, the National Bank of Dubai
			University London	the British Group and Rolls Royce
Scientific College of Design Oman	2004			
Oman College of Management and Technology Oman	2004			
Gulf Colege Oman	2004			
Middlesex University, Dubai Campus	2005	Branch Campus	Middlesex University	Various undergraduate degrees in Business,

				Comuting, Communication, Offers shot professional programmes
Georgetown University Edmund A. Walsh School of Forein Service, Qatar	2006	Branch Campus	Georgetown University	International Affairs
Weil Cornell Medical College in Qatar	2006	Branch Campus	Cornell University	Two year premed programme and four year medical program
Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar	2006	Branch Campus	Verginia Commonwealth University	?
Bayan College Oman	2006			
Oman Dental College Oman	2006			
Box Hill College Kuwait	2007			
Texas A&M at Qatar	2007	Branch Campus	Texas A&M	Engineering
Middlesex University, Dubai	2007			
Herriot-Watt University Dubai	2007			
American College of the Emirates Dubai	2007			
George Mason University Ras al Khaimah	2007	Branch Campus	George Mason University	
Hult International Business School	Dubai	Branch Campus		MBA
CHN University Qatar		Formal Endorsement	CHN University of Higher Professional Education Netherlands	Hotel Management
			London Metropolitan University	London Metropolitan University has accredited four MA programmes
Medical Uniniversity of Bahrain		Branch Campus	Constituent University of Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	
New York Institute of Technology		Sub-Contracting		Offers graduate and undergraduate programmes through intititional affiliation in Bahrain, Jordan and

				Abu Dhabi
University College of Bahrain		Symbolic Association	American University of Beirut	Member of AACSB, "the highest accreditation body in the USA"
European University College, Brussels, Dubai		Branch Campus	European University College, Brussels	International MBA and Bachelor Degrees in Administration
Islamic Azad University, Dubai		Branch Campus	Islamic Azad University, Iran	Oldest private university in Iran
Mahatama Gandhi University, Off Campus Center, Dubai		Branch Campus	Mahatama Gandhi University, Kerala, India	Established as an Offshoot of Kerala University in 1985
Manchester Business School, Worldwide Dubai		Branch Campus	Manchester Business School	Executive MBA, Executive Centers in Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai
St. Petersburg University of Engineering and Economics, Dubai		Branch Campus	St. Petersburg University of Engineering and Economics	Degree programmes in Russian language only
Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Science and Technology, Dubai		Branch Campus	Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Science and Technology, Karachi Pakistan	Has four campuses, Dubai is only one outside Pakistan. Offers Business degrees in Dubai
Scientific College of Design Oman	2004			
Oman College of Management and Technology Oman	2004			
Gulf College Oman	2004			
Middlesex University, Dubai Campus	2005	Branch Campus	Middlesex University	Various undergraduate degrees in Business, Computing, Communication, Offers short professional programmes
Georgetown University Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Qatar	2006	Branch Campus	Georgetown University	International Affairs
Weil Cornell Medical College in Qatar	2006	Branch Campus	Cornell University	Two year premed programme and four year medical program
Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar	2006	Branch Campus	Virginia Commonwealth University	?
Bayan College	2006			

Oman				
Oman Dental College Oman	2006			
Box Hill College Kuwait	2007			
Texas A&M at Qatar	2007	Branch Campus	Texas A&M	Engineering
Middlesex University, Dubai	2007			
Herriot-Watt University Dubai	2007			
American College of the Emirates Dubai	2007			
George Mason University Ras al Khaimah	2007	Branch Campus	George Mason University	
Hult International Business School	Dubai	Branch Campus		MBA
CHN University Qatar		Formal Endorsement	CHN University of Higher Professional Education Netherlands	Hotel Management
			London Metropolitan University	London Metropolitan University has accredited four MA programmes
Medical University of Bahrain		Branch Campus	Constituent University of Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	
New York Institute of Technology		Sub-Contracting		Offers graduate and undergraduate programmes through institutional affiliation in Bahrain, Jordan and Abu Dhabi
University College of Bahrain		Symbolic Association	American University of Beirut	Member of AACSB, "the highest accreditation body in the USA"
European University College, Brussels, Dubai		Branch Campus	European University College, Brussels	International MBA and Bachelor Degrees in Administration
Islamic Azad University, Dubai		Branch Campus	Islamic Azad University, Iran	Oldest private university in Iran
Mahatama Gandhi University, Off Campus Center, Dubai		Branch Campus	Mahatama Gandhi University, Kerala, India	Established as an Offshoot of Kerala University in 1985
Manchester Business School, Worldwide Dubai		Branch Campus	Manchester Business School	Executive MBA, Executive Centers in Hong Kong,

				Singapore and Dubai
St. Petersburg University of Engineering and Economics, Dubai		Branch Campus	St. Petersburg University of Engineering and Economics	Degree programmes in Russian language only
Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Science and Technology, Dubai		Branch Campus	Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Science and Technology, Karachi Pakistan	Has four campuses, Dubai is only one outside Pakistan. Offers Business degrees in Dubai
Scientific College of Design Oman	2004			
Oman College of Management and Technology Oman	2004			
Gulf College Oman	2004			
Middlesex University, Dubai Campus	2005	Branch Campus	Middlesex University	Various undergraduate degrees in Business, Computing, Communication, Offers short professional programmes

Source: Willoughby (2008, pp 34-41)

Appendix (3): Interview Questions

Appendix 3(A)

Interview Questions for Students/Graduates

1. What were the factors that contributed to your final choice between a public and a private institution?
2. On what basis did you decide about your subject of study?
3. How would you compare a degree from a private college with an overseas degree?
4. In what ways, do you think, will your subject of study affect your future career?
5. What are your main concerns, if any, with your employment perspective after graduation?
6. What do you think are the main advantages of attending a private/public college? How about disadvantages?
7. What role do you think higher education institutions should play in preparing their students for employment?
8. How do you evaluate your university's efforts in preparing you for the labour market?
9. What do you think are the important skills for a good employment perspective in the labour market?
10. To what extent do you think that your college has provided you with what you need for employment?

Appendix 3(B)

Interview Questions for Administrators/Faculty

1. How do you interpret the Government initiative in allowing your sector to operate?
2. What role do you think private higher education institutions play comparing to public higher education institutions? To what extent are they different?
3. How do you understand the missions of your institution?
4. To what extent, do you think, is the central Government involved in private higher education institutions ?
5. How do you decide about the kind of programmes that you offer?
6. To what extent is your institution concerned about the market needs? How do you address those needs?
7. To what extent is your institution concerned about the employability of its graduates? What are your practices in this regards?
8. How do you follow up with your graduates' employment information? Do you keep records?
9. What are the main challenges- do you think your institution is facing at the moment?

Appendix 3(C)

Interview Questions for Employers

1. What is the nature of your organization?
2. What is the percentage of national to expatriates in your organization?
3. To what extent do you find university graduates qualified for job requirements?
4. Upon what criteria do you base your selection of graduate applicants for your organization?
5. What kind of skills are you looking for in university graduates? And to what extent are they fulfilling your expectations? What can be improved in this regard?
6. What kind of training programmes does your organization offer to graduates once they are recruited?
7. What are the differences, if any, do you find between private / public/ overseas graduate applicants?
8. What kinds of communication/ collaborations are there between your organisation and higher education institutions?
9. What is your general view on private higher education?

Appendix 3 (D)

Interview Questions for Government Officials

1. What are the factors behind your decision of allowing private provision of higher education?
2. How do you assess the role of different type of higher education institutions (public and private)? What are the tasks that you would like private institutions to perform?
3. What are the major factors that you consider before allowing private institutions to operate?
4. To what extent is graduates' employability important in this process?
5. What are the main concerns you have any concerns regarding the effectiveness of private higher education institutions?
6. To what extent can the Government control or influence private higher education institutions?
7. From the Ministry's perspective, what role does Private higher education play in terms of addressing the needs of the labour market and skills development?
8. What is mechanism, if any, do you use to identify subjects needed to be provided by private higher education institutions?
9. What is there the communication mechanism with other agencies as to identify the market needs?
10. To what extent and why is the role of private higher education different from that of public higher education in terms of addressing the labour market and skills needs of KSA?
11. What is the Ministry's future plan for both sectors of higher education? What do you base your policy for private provision of higher education on? How do you evaluate its contribution of higher education?
12. Is there a specific policy and / or any initiatives and / or any strategy in place for Private higher education?
13. Is the Government aware of any challenges that are facing or could in the future face the private provision of higher education? Is the Ministry doing anything as to support the private provision on this regard?

Appendix (3): Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent for Dissertation Research Project Participation - Private Higher Education and the Employability of Graduates in the City of Jeddah Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Dear Participant,

I am a PhD student in the School of Lifelong Learning and Comparative Studies at the Institute of Education, University of London. I would like to invite you to participate in this important research project about the role of private provision of Higher Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I am interested in exploring private provision of higher education in the KSA. This is a very important study as it will seek to influence policy and practice in an emerging Higher Education agenda within KSA.

Your participation will comprise of up to a (45) minute interview, and will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. I will be complying with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research from the British Educational Research Association 2004. I will not identify your institution's name or your individual name in any publication. Your participation in this project is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study any time.

This study will be used to produce my PhD thesis, which will be published in hard copy, microfiche and electronic format which will be housed at the Institute of Education and the Senate House Libraries of the University of London. The data and the analysis of the data will also be used to produce articles, books, conference papers, as well as presented in conferences and lectures. In any of these formats I reassure you that your identity and anonymity will be protected.

I appreciate you giving time to this study, which will help me learn more about the role and contribution of private provision of Higher Education . If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at xxxxxx or contact me on xxxxxxxx

Signature_____ Date_____

I, _____(print your name), have read, or been informed of, the information about the study. By signing my name, I hereby consent to participate in this study.

Thank you.

Appendix (4): Majors Offered by Private Higher Education Institutions

Private Higher Education Institutions	Majors Offered
1-King Abdullah University for Science and Technology	Applied Mathematics, Biosciences, Chemical Engineering and Bio-Engineering, Computer Science, Geology and Geophysics, Electrical Engineering, Ecology and Eco-Engineering, Material Science and Engineering, Mechanical Engineering
2-Prince Sultan University	Marketing , Finance , Accounting , Computer Science , Information Systems , Interior Design Engineering , English Language Translation, Law (Women) , Master of Business Administration (MBA)
3- Arab Open University	Information Technology and Computing, Elementary Education Diploma, Business Administration, English literature
4-Prince Mohamed bin Fahd University	Accounting, Finance ,Management Information Systems, Information Technology, Computer Science, Computer Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering(Men), Civil Engineering (Men), Interior Design (Women)
5-Alfaisal University	Medicine , Engineering , Science , Technology Management
6-Al Yamamah University	Accounting , Marketing , Finance , Quality Management , Management Information Systems , Insurance
7-Effat University	Computer Science , Information Systems , Early Childhood Education , English and Translation , Electrical & Computer Engineering , Business Administration , Architecture
8-Dar Al Uloom University	Computer Engineering and Information Technology (Computer Science , Software Engineering , Information Technology) , College of Business Administration (Financial and banks , Accounting and auditing , Marketing management , Human resources management) , College of Law (General Law , Special Code) , College of Education (Early Childhood Education , Special Education , English Language , Computer Science
9- Fahad Bin Sultan University	Computer Science, Computer Engineering, Management, Marketing, Accounting, Finance, Mechanical Engineering, Electric Engineering, Civil Engineering
10-Dar Al- Hekma College	Graphic Design , Interior Design , Banking and Finance , Management Information Systems , Special Education-Gifted and Talented , Special Education-Learning Disabilities , Nursing , Law
11-Prince Sultan College for Tourism and Business	Tourism and Hospitality Management , Hospitality Diploma , Business Administration
12-Albaha Private College of Science	Computer Engineering , Business Information Systems , Accounting

13-College of Business Administration	Marketing , Management Information Systems , Human Resources Management , Finance , Accounting , Business Logistics Management , Masters of Business Administration
14-Soliman Fakeeh College for Science and Nursing	Nursing , Medical Sciences
15-Riyadh College of Dentistry	Dentistry , Dental Hygiene , Pharmacy , Dental Lab. Technology , Medical Laboratory , Dental Assisting , Diplomas in all majors
16-Ibn Sina National College for Medical studies	Human Medicine , Pharmacy , Dentistry, Nursing
17-Qassim Private College	Dentistry , Computer , Language
18-Prince Sultan College for Tourism and Management	Tourism and Hospitality Management , Tourism and Hospitality Diploma , Master of Business Administration
19-Batterjee Medical College	General Medicine , Nursing , Physical Therapy , Health Administration , Imaging and Radiology , Medical Laboratories , Emergency Medicine
20-Saad College of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences	Nursing
21-Arriyadah college of Medical Sciences	Nursing
22-Almarefah College for Science and Technology	Medicine , Pharmacy , Nursing , Computer Science , Information Systems
23-Buraydah college for Applied medical Sciences	Nursing , Radiology , Physical Therapy, Clinical Laboratory Science, Rehabilitation Medicine, Environmental Health Sciences, Nutrition, Medical Records, Faculty of Engineering, Accounting, Languages and Translation, Special Education, Law, Marketing, Human Resources Management
23-Mohammed Al Mani College for Medical Sciences	Pharmacy
24-Global colleges	BSc of Medicine and Surgery, BSc of Nursing and BSc of Computing and Telecommunications
25-Al-Farabi Dentistry College	Dentistry and Nursing
26-Al-Faisal Graduate College	Masters of Education in Educational Management & Supervision, Masters of Education in Educational Technology, Masters of Computer Science, Masters of Computer Applications and Systems Management, Masters of Science in Accounting, Professional Masters in Accounting, Masters of Law, Masters of Business Administration, Masters of Arts in Early Childhood Education, Masters of Arts in Special Education
27-Al-Ghad International Medical Science colleges	Medical Laboratories, Nursing, Health Management, Emergency Medicine, Radiology
28-Sulaiman Al Rajhi Colleges	Medicine
29-Inaya College	Preparatory Year

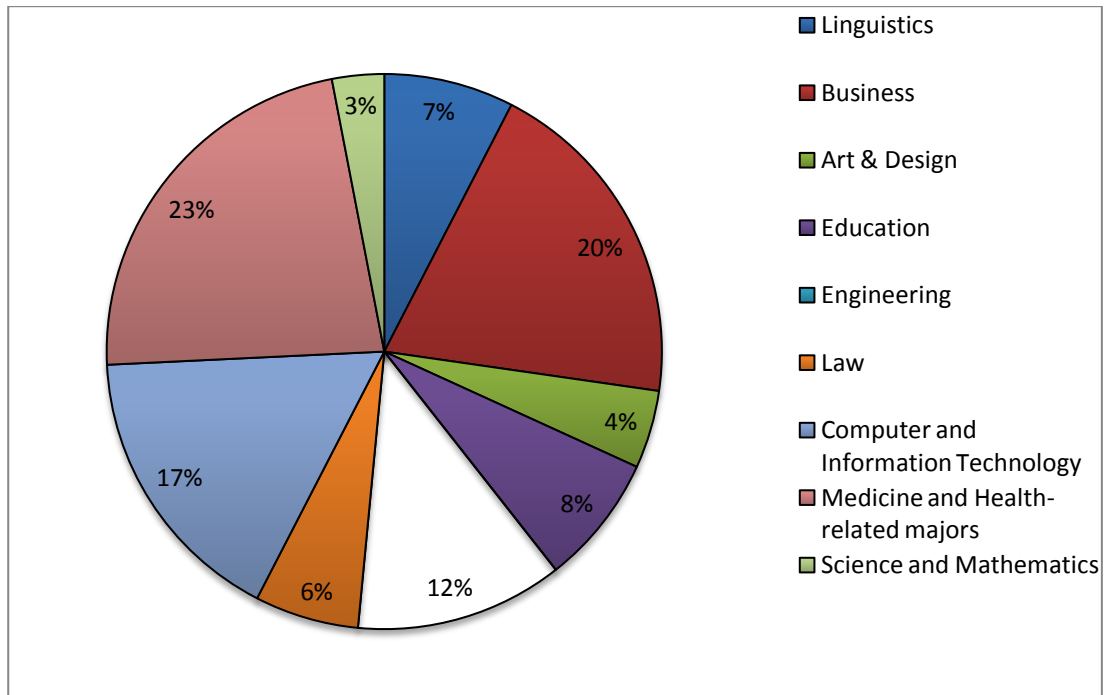
Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2012a)

Appendix (5): Proportional Distribution of All Higher Education Graduates by Majors

Field of Study	Ratio
Education	46.42
Humanities and Arts	17.39
Social& Economic Sciences and Law	15.28
Natural Science	9.44
Engineering Sciences	4.37
Agricultural Sciences	0.94
Health Sciences	6.15
Services	0.01
Total	100

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2010, p.51)

Appendix (6): Percentage of Majors offered by Private Higher Education Institutions



Source: Based on data from The Ministry of Higher Education (2012)

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