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Universities As Centers for Boosting Human Capital: A Descriptive Analytical Study of the Realization of Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

One of the key elements of the Saudi national developmental program outlined in the Vision 2030 program is the Human Capacity Development Establishment Program targeted to prepare Saudi leaders and people for the future by developing their global skills and ensuring that the youth are exposed to a conducive environment at centers of learning (Kosárová, 2020). The pivotal role of universities in shaping and bolstering a nation's human capital is beyond overstatement. This paper delves into the multifaceted dimensions of this critical relationship, analyzing the mechanisms through which universities contribute to the development and enhancement of human capital within a country. Drawing upon a comprehensive review of existing literature, this research explores various facets of university involvement in the process, including education, research, innovation, and the spread of knowledge. The paper begins by elucidating the conceptual framework surrounding human capital and its significance in national development strategies. It also examines the transformative power of higher education institutions in cultivating a skilled and adaptable workforce through rigorous academic curricula, experiential learning opportunities, and the cultivation of critical thinking abilities. Furthermore, it investigates the role of universities as hubs of research and innovation, fostering technological advancements, entrepreneurial endeavors, and socio-economic growth. Moreover, this study delves into the broader societal impact of universities, elucidating their role in promoting social mobility, fostering cultural diversity, and instilling values of civic engagement and responsibility. It also scrutinizes the effectiveness of government policies and institutional frameworks in leveraging the potential of universities to maximize human capital development. Through a comprehensive synthesis of empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks, this research aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders alike. By elucidating the intricate dynamics of the university-human capital nexus, this paper seeks to inform strategic interventions and initiatives aimed at harnessing the full potential of universities as engines of national development and prosperity.

Keywords: *Human Capital, Management, National Development, Socio-Economic Growth, Vision 2030, Universities In KSA.*

Introduction

The Human Capability Development Program launched in 2021 aims to empower the Saudi youth for the new emergent world order. Its fine print focuses on matching educational outcomes to the needs of the labor market, fostering innovation, and developing and upgrading skills, creating a pathway for individuals to reach their full potential (Rahman & Qattan, 2021). Early to higher education, therefore, needs to gear up to fulfil individual, national, and global ambitions. With this aim, the Education and Training Evaluation Commission also monitors the education sector in public and private domains and is responsible for planning, evaluation, assessment, and accreditation of educational and training systems (Al-Musallam, 2007). Being legally and financially independent, it holds specialized authority initiate actions that "raise their quality, efficiency, and their contribution to the service of the economy and national development in coherence with the Kingdom's Vision-2030." At the same time, employment situations and employer need also need close examination to ensure that such massive human resource and financial investment is result-oriented (Abalkhail, 2017).

Any national context is highly subject to global socio, economic, and political influences, which necessitates examination of theories of industrial relations (Bin-Hady, et al., 2024). Broadly, there are four theories that deal with the context of workers: Human Relations Theory, New Classical Theory, Human Relations Movement, and the Pluralistic Theory. The Human Relations Theory supports autonomy of the workforce and discourages their treatment as 'extensions of machinery', rejecting the idea of control (Morales, 2015).

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In this sense, this theory is a flag bearer of workers' satisfaction in the context of work, accepting and encouraging improvement of their skills, reducing workplace stress and developing work satisfaction in the process (Guest, 1987). From the perspective of the Hawthorne experiments, the productivity of the workforce lies in relationships forged at work. In addition to this, employer's attention on workers' welfare gives a boost to their morale, motivation and productivity. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy includes psychological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization as the goals in addition to McGregor's (1960) *Responsibility of Employee and Valued Employee* makes the distinction based on the productivity of workers. His Theory X goes against his Theory Y where people are considered as responsible and eager to work based upon motivation, this also forms the basis of HR Management Theory to be extended to Human Relationship Theories.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, management classicist Taylor (1911) and Gilbreths (1911) in the late nineteenth century spent time standardizing workers as also having an **emotional side to their selves**. Many held that excessive emphasis on worker standardization may not lead to results when compared to general standardization. Therefore, as Taylor (1911) and others were engaged with the former, others theorists engaged with what came to be known as Neo Classical Management Theories.

The Neo-classical Theory focused on employee support within the organizational structure (Eisner & Nadiri, 1968). Its basis lies in employee relationships, employee needs including their social needs, intrinsic job value, and jobs that lie outside the paradigm of what is 'standardized job' (Gordon, 1974). In this theory, employees share tasks, information, and knowledge in the organization, thus creating opportunities for socialization leading to better on-job production.

The Neo-Classical Theory is rooted in the Human Relations Movement (Mayo, experiments conducted between 1927-1932) and the Behavioral Movement (Skinner, 1938). The main emphasis of the former lay in people's relatedness and interaction with each other in a group which got a major boost from the contributions of other sociologists and physiologists. The focus of the latter, on the other hand, lay on the behavior of the individual which was boosted by the contributions of psychologists.

The Pluralistic Theory which was propounded by Commons (1919) in the US was based on selfish, individualistic interests that led to conflicts. However, compromise was achieved by employee interaction and collective bargaining in the organization. These conflicts were recognized by Managers who regulated them such that the workers also identified the cause of the conflict and felt prepared for negotiation with the organization. Rose (1990) held that pluralism is a characteristic of any organization as the inherent interests and objectives are related as well as different and their equilibrium is desirable. Thus, organizations are highly dynamic, always in a state of flux given the many interests and objectives that are always at play. Management of these calls for a plethora of roles, institutions, and processes to keep anarchy in check.

Universities of Excellence and Human Capital

The official webpage of Oxford University states as follows:

People are the foundation of the University's success and the quality of our academic, research, professional and support staff is critical to our future. In order for Oxford to remain a world- leading institution for research and teaching we must continue to attract, recruit and support talented individuals and provide a diverse, inclusive, fair and open environment that allows staff to grow and flourish.

Expanding on these thoughts, diversity in staffing, attracting the best of profiles, and holding hands in the personal and professional development of the employees are stated as the micro-objectives (Canham, 2014 O'Neill & Bagchi-Sen, 2023). These aims are central to maintaining the international character of this university in addition to adding value to the teaching and research by making available personal development support to those that are newcomers to research and to provide optimum work opportunities to the total employee base.

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Organizational strategic goals are integrated with HR practices at Harvard (Harvard HRM Model) outlining HR policy choices centered around enhancement of employee skills, motivation, and commitment. Following a holistic approach, this model identifies four key areas: Stakeholder Interests, Situational Factors, HRM Policies and Choices, and HR Outcomes (Boxall et al., 2007). Fulfilment of employee needs and business objectives are targeted through an integration of these four areas. Communication and feedback mechanisms that gather inputs via employee surveys, focus groups, and formal and informal meetings are a great way to identify areas of alignment and conflict (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2019). Further, the physical, social, and organizational environments are identified as factors that shape employee behavior and performance at the workplace. Allocation of tasks and responsibilities, social dynamics in the workplace and internal culture are all factors that impact employee performance. Job satisfaction, employees' physical and social well-being, and motivation are deeply influenced by the situational factors discussed earlier. A strong, capable, and motivated workforce is fundamental to organizational success. Attracting and retaining the best talent with the right mix of skills, vision, and commitment is one of the key needs (Reizer et al., 2019). The Model comprises competitive compensation packages, robust career development opportunities, and a nurturing work environment. Retention strategies may include personalized career trajectories, mentorship programs, and initiatives to acknowledge and reward employee achievements - all of which can contribute to lower turnover rates (Allen et al., 2010).

Further, ongoing performance monitoring and assessment using formal appraisals help employees improve and excel at their jobs. The Model states that the university also focuses on identifying performance gaps among its staff and implementing targeted strategies to address these gaps, such as providing training or coaching. This approach helps to enhance overall productivity and efficiency across the organization (Rothwell et al., 2012).

Finally, ongoing development of the workforce is recognized as central to filling skill gaps and preparing for future industry needs.

The university's approach encompasses a diverse range of initiatives, spanning formal education and training programs, as well as on-the-job learning and leadership development opportunities. By emphasizing continuous learning and development, the institution aims to cultivate a versatile and adaptable workforce, capable of navigating the rapidly evolving business environment (Goetsch & Davis, 2016).

One of the most important factors influencing the capacity of an area to prosper economically over the long term is its level of human capital. Further, as economies move away from production and distribution of products and towards the creation of ideas, the value of human capital specific to that area will only increase (Cohen & Soto, 2007). Interestingly little research has been carried out to determine why some places have higher levels of human capital than others (Dakhli & De Clercq, 2004). By concentrating on the degree to which the kinds and quantity of local human resources are connected to the operations of institutions of higher education (colleges and universities), we can add to the limited but expanding body of research in this field. According to the review of literature in this paper, higher education institutions can increase the amount of human capital in a community by raising both the supply and demand for skills in urban regions and by boosting the quality of skills, motivation, and satisfaction amongst their existing employees.

More and more people see colleges and universities as catalysts for regional development in the economy. This movement has been propelled by the economic triumphs of regions like Silicon Valley and the Boston area's Route 128 corridor, in addition to the broader acknowledgment of the current shift towards a knowledge-based economy (Addie et al., 2015). Moreover, there seems to be a consensus among policymakers—especially in deteriorating areas—that keeping graduates from nearby schools and universities on staff offers a viable solution to the region's economic problems. One of the best indicators of the long-term viability of the economy in a place is the quantity of human capital there. Higher human capital levels have been associated with increases in population, employment growth, earnings, income, and innovation, according to studies on regional economies (Collins & Halverson, 2010). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that higher levels of human capital within an area promote quicker reinvention and economic expansion over the long term. Unexpectedly little examination has been done to examine the

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factors that influence variations in the accumulation of human capital across geographic boundaries, despite the relevance of human capital to the economic performance of regional economies (Deming, 2022). This is a particularly important issue since, as a recent study has shown, over the past few decades, there has been a difference in human capital levels between cities. To shed some light on this matter, Jaison and others carried out an investigation in 2012 to determine whether "higher education activities," or the activities carried out by colleges and universities, are associated with the quantity and variety of human capital found in urban areas.

Harnessing the Human Capital at Saudi Universities

Local universities and colleges draw in, educate, and frequently retain students locally and regionally, which helps them to create human capital. A large portion of the literature now in publication on the topic focuses on a single step of this process, a single kind of institution, or a single kind of local environment (Abel & Deitz, 2012; Rubens et al., 2017). Even though these studies can produce valuable insights, focusing too narrowly on one or more of these components might mislead perceptions about how higher education institutions affect the communities they serve. Neil et al. (2023) broadened the scope of the literature by examining the students' journey from home to university and then to other places ten years after graduation, as well as by providing a more in-depth understanding of a cross-cultural aspect of region-layered colleges to adjust local higher education of different types and different variety of human capital supported by them. Results from 64 institutions under the State University of New York, distributed throughout ten labor market regions, demonstrate how the type of institution relates to the local/regional retention ten years afterward, the type of skills and training provided, and the geography of populations serviced. The research investigation also helped determine to what extent which variables like degree level, regional variation, and the study plan of the students are associated with growth in human capital (e.g., wages, retention), which helps to clarify the relationship between higher education institutions and the creation of both regional and local intellectual property.

To help the development of higher education in fulfilling the Vision theme, Saudi higher educational institutions (HEIs) must contribute to Vision 2030 by reforming their educational system and re-evaluating their capabilities and priorities (Alhamami, 2023). To achieve the higher educational development strategic objectives outlined in the document, several innovative educational endeavors have been created. The initial evaluation cycle (2016–2020) examined the techniques currently used by HEIs and evaluates their accomplishments as well as the direction in which the higher education development goals of the Vision are being moved. To learn more about how academic institutions from the top ten Saudi universities use innovative approaches to contribute to the Vision's success, surveys and expert interviews were performed with academic experts (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). Assessing the development progress by comparing the higher education objectives of the Vision with the potential and priorities of HEIs. The results showed that the new, contemporary educational program, industry-based instructional consequences, trained recent college graduates, professional growth for faculty, creative research, partnerships with international institutions, accreditations, and lifelong learning with an emphasis on future skills are the most sought-after priorities (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). These priorities tend to focus on developing higher education, enhancing professional competency, closing the discrepancies between the needs of the expanding market and higher education outcomes, reviving universities, and establishing connections with the knowledge-based society. The strategy outlined by Moinuddin et al. (2023) can be a useful tool for figuring out how exactly these entities contribute to reaching the goals of the vision. It is an important paradigm for additional investigation, helpful in analyzing the performances of higher education opportunities, and improves comprehension for consumers.

El-Tahan et al. (2021) examined the impact of Jouf University's role in advancing society for Vision 2030. Specifically, they sought to understand how employee management development and organizational development within institutions are impacted by training, ongoing education, technical consultations, and applied research. A survey was conducted with a sample of 393 people in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to achieve this goal. Additionally, the structural equations method (SEM) and SmartPLS programs to analyze the study data. Following an analysis and testing of the study's hypotheses, it was determined that Jouf University played a beneficial role in serving and cultivating the society for goals in the Saudi Arabia of

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2030. On skill development and training of applied investigators from the growth of management employees, there is a positive impact. However, there is another positive impact that seems on applied researchers and continuing universities on organizations' growth of universities.

In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Education (MoE) oversees the entire education sector steered for getting the young people ready for the workforce in the decades to come as per the Saudi Vision 2030. The government's opinion that university education is essential to the country's shift from an oil-based economy to an economy centred around knowledge is demonstrated by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's recent expansion of higher education institutions, both in terms of both number and quality (Yas et al., 2024). The Department of Education has improved educational standards nationwide and redesigned curricula. The nation's capacity to improve human capital and close the skills disparity between college and university students and workforce requirements is essential to Vision 2030's success. Government job programs have helped Saudi nationals, but educational institutions also need to adjust and make sure their pupils are well-equipped with trending skills that are in demand. They should similarly respond to the adoption of new skill sets as per trends in the market (OECD, 2020). The purpose of the paper published by Rayan in 2023 is to highlight the status of colleges and universities in Saudi Arabia. Rayan also focussed on the available opportunities inside Saudi academic institutions to tackle the gaps in skills and pieces of training. They also presented the factors that are impacting Saudi Arabian universities led by an open discussion on initiatives taken by the current Saudi government toward enhancing the quality of education in higher institutions (Ryan, 2023). Despite of many improved educational programs and training conducted by the Saudi Arabian government, there is still a room for skill gap which is a concern for higher authorities. In this paper, they tried to find out the problems and tried to provide solutions to bridge the gap.

Finding out how Saudi universities and the commercial sector interact to accomplish economic development considering the Kingdom's 2030 objective was the goal of a study conducted by Darawsheh et al. (2013). To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher used a quantitative technique and a descriptive research design, primarily relying on the questionnaire as the main instrument for data collection. 180 university leaders in the southern part of Saudi Arabia were used as the sample size for the inquiry; they were all selected at random. The results of this study showed that leaders expected Saudi universities and the commercial sector to have a mutually beneficial partnership. Additionally, the outcomes show that in terms of variables of academic ranking and yearly experiences, there is no statistical evidence of variations in the mutual relationship between Saudi higher institutions and the private sector.

Numerous facets of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 have been the subject of studies since its implementation. Several facets of the education system have been clarified by these studies, including human development (Pavan, 2017), growth in higher education, the environment framework, and Saudi universities that are in line with the Vision. Studies that have taken into account higher education's (HE) potential in light of the Vision's HE development strategic goals, as well as the advancement and accomplishments of HE within the framework of the Vision context, are scarce, nonetheless. Research of this kind would need to take a more comprehensive approach, looking at areas including infrastructure for learning, human resources, technological advances, and decision-making within the higher education sector (Chankseliani, 2021). The strategy also must identify the main pillars of HEIs and their priorities, which include faculty growth, cutting-edge research, modern curricula, partnerships with foreign universities, accreditations, skilled graduates, and university rankings for HE aims and improvement. Nonetheless, the vision realization programs (VRPs) have placed a high focus on education development. Furthermore, as evidenced by His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, the Crown Prince, Vice President of the Council of Ministers, "Therefore, we will not rest until our nation is a leader in providing opportunities for all through education and training," education development is high on the Saudi government's agenda. HE strategic goals are emphasized in two of the Vision's VRPs: human capital development (HCD) and national character enrichment (NCE) which is more focussed on educational development and for bright future of Saudi students is more influenced by neoliberal academic reform (Lim & Park, 2022).

The goals of the VRPs are to generate the best brains and to provide a platform for transitioning between academic learning outcomes and the demands of the labour market (Heinesen, 2018). The global (global/ national/local) heuristic has been used in this work to determine how higher education advances national

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development. Through strategic alliances with all relevant parties, the Vision's HCDP aspires to further educational progress and increase citizens' competitiveness. Its three levels of strategic objectives are divided into direct and indirect categories. HE development is covered in level one direct aim number four since it improves students' social and intellectual skills and gets them ready for lifetime learning. It places a strong emphasis on enhancing individuals' capacities and makes it easier for residents to acquire the information, values, and skills needed to successfully compete in the global marketplace.

Conclusion

The World Bank prepares a report on Human Capital Index (HCI) to project and rank countries based on the economic and professional potential of a country. This is a good indicator for countries that are undergoing fundamental changes such as Saudi Arabia where governmental policies are leaning increasingly away from petro-money and towards the tertiary sector including higher education. However, this report has many flaws primarily because its basis is more the outcomes than the processes, one reason why it can reflect poorly on KSA. What is worrisome is that these flaws are methodical, there being substantial data gaps in the reckoning. This has caused some countries to ignore the ranking with only as few as 39 countries embracing it (though with reservations in place nevertheless). Not only the assumptions, but also, the reporting has shortcomings, such as predictions of national human capital using stunting and survival rates to measure health and learning quality. Moreover, productivity in the young populations is judged by education. On this count, Saudi Arabia, with massive educational reforms and more than 8% of the GDP being invested in the education sector (higher than the global average of over 4%) can hope for a higher rank than many countries. Experts in many unconnected fields, however, exhibit keen interest in these reports, as they at least encourage the academia to engage in discussion. Change, at the same time, is a collective responsibility and deficiencies in the report can be made up for by robust governmental policies.

Recommendations

The challenges before the Saudi universities are many in the context of harnessing human capital in the echelons of higher education. To begin with, organizations have to be set firmly on the road of cooperation rather than pure competition, a task that is the primary onus of organizational leaders. The objective is to create organizations that are humane, evolving, empowering, while also demanding the highest degree of productivity, output and profitability from all stakeholders, including the learners. It is safe to assume that this goal is best achieved by putting people first in the organization. Secondly, relationships between the university managements on the one hand, and the teachers, staff, and learners on the other, have to be based on mutual adjustment of interests and their shared goals. Three, truly progressive institutions of higher education will recognize the need for continuous growth and development of its workforce and strengthening of mutual relationships between all players. Mini assessments and appraisals of performance and course correction without coercive action using conflict resolution methods should be encouraged. A happy and motivated workforce in these institutions will give its best to the 'clients' i.e. the learners who, in turn, will find their individual and collective needs satisfied in a prolific learning environment. Major changes and restructuring of components that directly affect the learners should be a collaborative exercise whose positive outcomes should be presented to all the stakeholders. Increased attention needs to be given to the selection of leaders in these institutions, and group inputs need to be taken care of while pondering this aspect. Feedback mechanisms at all levels and redressal of shortcomings should become the top priority of institutions where the tangible and intangible interests of the learners and teaching staff should be attended to most solemnly if Saudi universities are to become centers of excellence as enshrined in the Vision 2030 document.

Limitations

Given the scope of the study, individual opinions and views on what enables universities to harness human capital could not be included here. In addition to this, tracing the development of universities over an expanse of time, into truly international centers of learning would have added a significant dimension to the conclusions drawn. It is hoped that future studies in this direction will heed these limitations.

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