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Capacity building through vocational Training in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: An Overview

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Abstract

Human capacity is key factor in nation development .Vocational education is a source enhance and sparkle human capacity building. It can be defined as equip people's with commercial or industrial expertise. Vocational education can be obtained from the technical schools and colleges or on the job training. The purpose of this paper is to analysis the situation of currently vocational institutes in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by measuring key factors like type of vocational educations courses, level of training and their impact on capacity building for industries. Finding of the results addressed the key area of impact like social, labour market and enterprise performance. Error correction and Johnson co-integration methods are used to measure the nature of relationship in the framework to determine the relationship between the variables and discussed key findings along with valuable suggestions that government should take step to ensure vocational education and training as a tool of national development.

Keywords: Capacity Building, Vocation training, tertiary institutions, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Capacity Building

The capacity to engage with stakeholders and create consensus around a policy, a bill or a plan; the capacity to articulate the mandate of a new institution or to vision the trajectory of an organisation or even a society; the capacity to develop a strategy, translate it into a plan and prepare a budget; the capacity to implement a programme or a policy and the capacity to monitor its implementation and evaluate results are all fundamental capacities that organisations, institutions and societies need in order to be effective and function well. These capacities transcend sectors and unit size; they are common to ministries of education and ministries of environment and natural resources, parliaments and human right commissions, small local government units and offices of the auditor general alike.

While capacity development or building can be, describe as following:

- Capacity development is a process of change, and hence is about managing transformations. People's capacities, institutional capacity, and a society's capacity change over time. A focus on

what development policies and investments work best to strengthen the abilities, networks, skills and knowledge base cannot be a one-off intervention.

- There can be short-term results. In addition, often in crises and post conflict situations there is a need for such. However, even short-term capacity gains, such as increase in monetary incentives or introducing a new information system, must be supported by a sustained resource and political commitment to yield longer-term results that truly affect existing capacities.

- Capacity development takes place at three different levels: the individual level, the organizational level and the societal level. These three levels are interlinked and interdependent. An investment in capacity development must design and account for impact at these multiple levels.

- Capacity development is about who and how and where the decisions are made, management takes place, services are delivered and results are monitored and evaluated. It is primarily an endogenous process, and whilst supported and facilitated by the international development community, it cannot be owned or driven from the outside. At the end of the day, it is about capable and transformational states, which enable capable and resilient societies to achieve their own development objectives over time.

What is Vocational Training?

Vocational training is instructions intended to equip people for industrial or commercial occupations. It may be obtained formally either in trade schools, technical Secondary schools or in on –the Job training programmes or more informally by picking up the necessary skills on the job.

Technological development and advancement revolved around a sound vocational/technical education programme as cited by Otuaga, Mayes (2010) in (Bulus 1991:41) vocational skills in schools is a relative modern development. Akaniwor (1988:41) observes that" the bed rock of any technical break through is the existence of appropriate skill, abilities and competence both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in the society is a dynamic instrument of change" According to Bulus (1991:30).vocational technical education involves the acquisition of skills and competences that can help individuals to function productively in industries and commercial occupation. Until the 19th century such education, except for the professions, was provided only by apprenticeship. This situation was partly due to the low social status associated with such instructions as opposed to a classical curriculum which was considered "necessary for a youth" with growth of individualization during the 19th century, however, several European countries ,notably Germany, began introducing vocational education in elementary and secondary schools. In Great Britain, however, opposition to vocational education persisted into the 20th century. Although a few trade and junior technical schools were established by local authorities before the world war ll. By the 19th century, public (common) schools vocational education in he United states consisted of manual training and practical arts. These programmes were generally expanded until 1917 when Federal aid was provided to public schools for trade and industry.

Challenges facing Vocational Education in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Some of the challenges facing vocational technical education are numerous, they are as follow:

- Poor elaboration of the practical aspects of vocational technical education as most tertiary institutions in Nigeria charged with the responsibility to teach vocational technical education courses today are poorly equipped with machines and relevant tools.
- Lack of skilled manpower
- Poor remuneration of vocational technical education.
- Lack of follow-up and continuity in government policies.
- Scarcity of vocational technical teachers
- Lack of adequate technical training facilities and modern equipment.
- Lack of entrepreneurship education in vocational technical education and training.

Vocational Education Prospective in Saudi Arabia

The vocational education system is a very complicated system indeed. It consists of several components and factors interacting with each other. This research adopts the view that vocational education does not operate in a vacuum but it is best conceptualised as an open system deeply rooted in the culture and strongly influenced by the environmental variables of each country or region. Thus, the first step in the study of a vocational education system is to investigate the environmental context within which the system operates. Environmental factors that exert a major influence on vocational education in Saudi Arabia are outlined below.

Economic Prospective

There was little development in the field of education in the Arab peninsula prior to the discovery of oil. Only a small proportion of the population had access to any form of education. Furthermore, education was limited to religious schools teaching Islamic laws and values and basic literacy skills and confined to big cities (Tibawi, 1972).

The high financial surplus from oil revenues in the 1970s and the early 1980s enabled the government to invest heavily in both general and vocational education. In the Fifth Development Plan (1990–94) the government allocated 19% of its total expenditure to general and vocational education and increased this proportion to 23% in 1998. As a result, Saudi Arabia has constructed seven universities, 82 colleges and more than 18,000 schools. The expansion of education has resulted in an extensive increase in the student population. Since the early 1970s, the number of students increased six fold and around 4 million students enrolled in Saudi schools in 1996.

Labour Market Prospective

The Saudi Arabian economy relies heavily on a core of foreign workers cutting across all sectors and skill levels. The high economic growth during the oil boom in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in a shortage in the number of workers needed to support the growing economy. The transformation from an economy based on nomadic trade, fishing and agriculture to an economy based on hydrocarbon, construction and service industries using modern technological production processes, resulted in the need for a new breed of skilled workers, who were not available locally.

Thus, in a country of 19 million people, over 6 million were foreigners in the mid 1990s. No less than 60% of the working population is foreign. Data indicates that foreign workers' remittances are draining the economy. Total remittances by foreign workers averaged approximately of around $15 billion in the first half of the 1990s. Moreover, these remittances increased by 40% during the 1989 and 1994 period (Cooper, 1996). A recent study by The National Commercial Bank revealed that 40% of Saudi Arabian oil revenue leaves the country in the form of remittances every year (Azzam, 1997).

In addition, Saudi Arabia has one of the highest population growth rate of 3.5%. More than 50% of the population are under the age of 15. Furthermore, although there is no official data on unemployment in Saudi Arabia, officials accept the fact that the number of young Saudis out of work is increasing rapidly.

Another major characteristic of the Saudi Arabian labour market is that Saudis hold mainly white collar jobs in the public sector whereas skilled and manual jobs are held by foreign workers (Cooper, 1996).

Saudis in the public sector are paid high wages. On the contrary, wages for skilled and manual jobs held by foreigners are very low. As a result, the labour market has inherited a legacy where white collar jobs in the public sector exceed private sector wages at lower and medium level of skills (Economics and Business, 1997). This distortion between wages for administrative jobs and skilled jobs affects individuals' incentives to invest in vocational skills.

Given these labour market conditions, it is clear that if Saudi Arabia is to become independent of foreign workers and improve productivity throughout its economy, a pool of national skilled, disciplined and productive workers has to be created. Therefore, the ability of vocational education institutions to generate both the quantity and quality of skills needed by the economy, and their appropriate use in employment is central to the success of national HRD strategy.

Political Prospective

Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy, where the King is the chief figure in the government, and the Head of State. The Council of Ministers is the most powerful among all governing bodies. It assesses vocational education plans and makes policy recommendations to the King, who has the final approving authority. Concern that unemployment of the native workforce could stir social upheaval prompted the government to address the problem of meeting the expectations of the rapidly expanding young Saudi population entering the labour market.

First, the government is aiming to improve the capacity and performance of the vocational education and training system as a mean of increasing the national supply of skilled people compatible with the needs of the economy. Consequently, since the late 1980s, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, regional Chambers of Commerce and the General Organisation for Technical Education and Vocational Training (GOTEVT) have allocated significant resources to vocational education and this commitment appears to be set to continue for the foreseeable future.

Secondly, the government is seeking to control and regulate labour importation and employment and replace foreign workers with Saudis. 'Saudisation', therefore, has become a buzz word in Saudi Arabia. The Sixth National Development Plan (1995–2000) projected that 319,500 expatriate workers would be replaced by Saudi workers by the year 2000. In mid-1990, no less than 65% of public sector workers were Saudis, whereas, less than 7% of private sector employees and only 4% of workers in the industrial sector were Saudis (Cooper, 1996). Recent studies in Saudi Arabia predict that no less than 95% of the expected increase in the number of Saudi workers in the 1995–2000 period will occur in the private sector (Economics and Business, 1997). Moreover,
these jobs will be manual skilled jobs requiring vocational skills (Economics and Business, 1997).

To force the private sector to employ Saudis, the government introduced legislation in the mid 1990s which required private organisations to employ Saudis and to increase the number of Saudis employed by 5% a year or face sanctions (Resolution 50). In addition, the government increased the cost of hiring expatriates by introducing compulsory health care for expatriates. Furthermore, the cost of issuing and renewing work visas has doubled since 1994. Nevertheless, despite the attempts by the government to increase the cost of employing foreign workers, Saudis are still more expensive to employ than foreign workers (Cooper, 1996). Moreover, private sector managers have been voicing their concern on the implications of Saudisation. They argue that unless Saudi workers are as skilled and disciplined as foreign workers, Saudisation will undermine their competitiveness (Lumsden, 1993; Cooper, 1996).

Cultural Prospective

Culture exerts a strong influence on vocational education. The values and social attitudes to vocational work and education in Saudi Arabia are so different from those found in the developed world (see Hofstede, 1980). This perception is the product of social cultural values and attributes, some deeply rooted in Middle Eastern history and some product of the oil-boom experience. The major contemporary cultural and social features of the Middle East that have influence on the vocational education system can be attributed to two main factors.

First, Saudi Arabia's colleges of technology are for men only. This is due to the cultural belief amongst the vast majority of Saudis that child bearing remains life's principal objective for women. A woman's career is limited to home economics, education and nursing. One report summarised the options available for Saudi women as follows '(Saudi women) will not stand in production lines in large factories, and will not work as secretaries in companies and will not work in service industry as hostesses in airplanes or sales assistants' (Economics and Business, 1997, p. 60). That is, half of the society is excluded from engaging in vocational education and

training.

Secondly, Saudi Arabian society holds a negative perception of skilled and manual jobs. One of the main contributory factors is the association of these jobs with expatriates. The absolute majority of these jobs are held by low paid expatriates with a low social status. In addition, Saudi Arabian families and Bedouin tribes take pride in not being involved in the so called downcast work and take pride in working in the prestige sectors i.e. administrative work in the public sector.

The first Five Year Development Plan (1970–75) gave birth to the Saudi Arabian vocational education and training system. Several government institutions have contributed to the development of the vocational education and training system. While the strategic planning and decision making are carried out by the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Planning and the Manpower Planning Board, the GOTEVT and
several specialised training institutions implement the strategy. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and chambers of commerce liaise between the vocational education and training institutions and the labour market.

Although the number of students enrolled on vocational education and training courses increased twenty-nine-fold during the 1970–96 period, compared with the general and higher education sector, the vocational education system is still very small. In 1996, about 3.6 million and over 237,000 students enrolled on general and higher education courses respectively, however only 37,636 male students were studying at technical education and vocational training institutions.

Only students who could not remain in the general education stream after primary and intermediate education go to the vocational training centers and intermediate vocational colleges, respectively. Furthermore, in theory, after completing intermediate education, a student can choose either general secondary education or secondary vocational education. In practice, however, secondary vocational education limits students' chances to acquire university education which has traditionally provided access to highly paid and social respected white collar jobs. Consequently, secondary vocational education is regarded as second rate to general secondary education and only academically weaker students, who cannot meet the academic requirements for general education, are driven into the vocational system.

In 1996, there were around 1,252 secondary schools enrolling more than 265,000 students. In the same academic year, higher education represented by seven universities and few specialised high schools enrolled over 128,800 male and 108,359 female student. The above data reveals that despite the rapid expansion of general secondary education, the higher education system is at present still able to absorb a very high percentage of students with secondary school diplomas. Thus, only students obtaining the secondary school diploma with grades below university requirements enroll in post-secondary vocational education system.

It is very difficult to present a comprehensive picture of the present vocational education and training system because the vocational education system is highly fragmented. But Figure 1 presents a simplified picture of the vocational education and training system in Saudi Arabia. Several ministries and large companies have established their own training centres to cater for their own needs. Furthermore, the extensive financial resources allocated to vocational education

and training led to several authorities developing vocational training courses. For instance, all chambers of commerce are very active in job training and provide short to medium vocational courses. In addition, three major universities namely KFUPM, King Saud University and King Abdul-Aziz university announced in 1998 that they were establishing a community college each in Hail, Tabuk and Gizan respectively. These community colleges provide vocational courses leading to a university diploma and the possibility of obtaining a university degree from the mother university.

As shown in Figure 1, colleges of technology are one of the key providers of post-secondary vocational education. Their niche market is the production of highly skilled technicians and middle management to replace foreign workers in the private sector. Although colleges of technology offer business and computer programming subjects leading to office jobs, their main focus is on mechanical, electrical and production subjects which are the foundation of skilled manual jobs.

The first college of technology established in the mid-1980s in Riyadh. At present, there are nine colleges of technology covering most regions of Saudi Arabia. The government assumes that, in addition to producing skills compatible with the needs of the economy, colleges of technology divert post-secondary students into vocational studies rather than university education or white-collar work in the public sector. It is expected that this will lessen the pressure for white collar jobs in the public sector and reduce the tension that unmet demand for employment can bring.

Colleges of technology award the Junior University Certificate after the completion of 90 credit hours. Although the programme is designed for two years full time study, the credit hours system is flexible and allows students to study at their own pace.

Colleges of technology pay high salaries to Saudi and expatriates teachers and instructors and attractive packages for vocational education consultants from Germany. As a result, they are able to attract highly qualified teachers, instructors and consultants. In addition, a policy of low staff/student ratio is exerted by placing a cap on class size at a maximum of 25 students. In engineering departments, classes of less than 10 students are very common. Each student is closely supervised by a member of staff and given a personal tutorial tailor-made to his specific needs. Furthermore, colleges of technology are equipped with highly sophisticated machines and equipment, computers and computer software.

The curriculum consists of both general and vocational subjects. General subjects comprise English and Arabic languages, Islamic culture, mathematics, statistics, physics and industrial safety. Arabic is the language of instruction. As stated in the policy document of the colleges, the curriculum should enable students to be trained and improve their prospect for employment by placing greater emphasis on equipping them with skills that are currently required by the labour market.

Colleges of technology have strong links with regional chambers of commerce and key private sector employers. Links with local employers and regional chambers of commerce have been central to colleges of technology management. Each college of technology has a member of staff from the local chamber of commerce or a key private sector employer as a full time member of the college's board. The latter serves as an ambassador of the private sector. Furthermore, in the

quest of tailoring their courses to meet local employers' needs, colleges of technology conduct systematic surveys and meetings with local employers to identify local needs and feed-back on students' performance in employment. This information is systematically used to guide reviews of the curriculum.

The quality of vocational education and training depends a great deal on the ability of vocational education institutions to adjust the content of training to meet changing skills needs. Sustainable capacity for curriculum development and revision is a characteristic of flexible and high quality training (Middleton et al, 1993). The availability of financial, human and physical resources enable colleges of technology to develop curricula and review them continuously. As a result, contrary to several LDCs, where curricula are deemed outdated and irrelevant to labour market needs (Edgare et al, 1996; Salmi, 1991), curricula at Saudi colleges of technology are flexible and updated yearly to meet labour market needs.

Conclusion

Despite the considerable efforts of the Saudi Arabian government to improve and expand vocational education, the system is experiencing difficulty in meeting the demands of the labour market in terms of both quantity and quality of skills.

This research reveals that vocational education in Saudi Arabia does not encounter the same problems as many other LDCs. At present, financial constraints do not pose a problem in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the active participation of the Chambers of Commerce and employers from the private sector in the design of curriculum made them highly relevant to the needs of the labour market. Furthermore, Saudisation policy is leading to an expansion in job opportunity for Saudis with vocational skills.

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