

Chapter 1

Introduction

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ABSTRACT

Education is a significant sector, and higher education plays a great role in this knowledge era. Education is not only important and dynamic but also ever changing as per the needs of society. Education has a wider meaning nation wise and even culturally contextualized. This chapter gives a historical background of education and then critically delves into the origin of higher education, the current scenario, and the impending outlook, with focus on the MENA region. The education sector returns are immeasurable, but the sector is also demanding and challenging, especially for the MENA region. Education systems will need to become more effective in transmitting skills and competencies to all. MENA countries in particular will have to consider not only how education will be delivered but also how it will be paid for. Meeting the above challenges is fundamental. The succeeding chapters will facilitate policy makers to meet those challenges.

BACKGROUND

Misperception abounds many sectors in the globalized environment. Education is certainly one of them and more so 'Higher Education'. Many people are mixed up about Higher Education, because there have been a lot of changes recently, including institutions changing their names and titles. To start with, the definition of the terms - Education and Higher Education - in fact, there is no simple definition of either of the terms. Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which knowledge, skills, and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training, research, or simply

through auto didacticism Kendall D et al (2004). Generally, it occurs through any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts. Higher education thus, generally involves work towards a degree-level or foundation degree qualification. In most developed countries a high proportion of the population (up to 50%) now enters higher education at some time in their lives. Higher education is therefore very important to national economies, both as a significant industry in its own right, and as a source of trained and educated personnel for the rest of the economy. To add to this maze, a power shift is occurring in higher education, driven by two trends: (a) the increased freedom of learners to access, create, and re-create content; and (b) the opportunity

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for learners to interact with each other outside a mediating agent. Information access and dialogue, previously under control of the educator, can now be readily fulfilled by learners. Once, the essential mandate of universities is buffeted by global, social/political, technological, and educational change pressures, questions about the future of higher education: policies and practice become pertinent and prominent. The integrated university system which stood for higher education faces numerous challenges, including a decoupling of research and teaching functions. Do we still need physical classrooms? Are courses effective when information is fluid across disciplines and subject to continual changes? What value does a university provide to society when educational resources and processes are open and transparent? After more than a century of pedagogical innovation and several decades of technological advancements, higher education largely retains the systemic structure of previous generations. This system is increasingly mismatched to the needs of society and the affordances of technology in fostering a new scholarship based on open participatory practices. What is done with information in a particular era is reflected in the institutions created to serve society (McNeely & Wolverton, 2008).

ORIGIN OF HIGHER EDUCATION: FROM WHERE WE CAME

Universities, as we know them today, have been in existence for over one millennium. The history of education according to Dieter Lenzen, president of the Freie Universität Berlin 1994, “began either millions of years ago or at the end of 1770”. Education as a science cannot be separated from the educational traditions that existed before. Adults trained the young of their society in the knowledge and skills they would need to master and eventually pass on. The evolution of culture, and human beings as a species depended on this practice of transmitting knowledge. In pre-literate societies

this was achieved orally and through imitation. Story-telling continued from one generation to the next. Oral language developed into written symbols and letters. The depth and breadth of knowledge that could be preserved and passed soon increased exponentially. When cultures began to extend their knowledge beyond the basic skills of communicating, trading, gathering food, religious practices, etc., formal education, and schooling, eventually followed.

The first large established university is thought to be ‘Nalanda’ established in 427 A.D in India (Alatas, Syed Farid, 2006). At its peak, the university attracted scholars and students from as far away as Tibet, China, Greece, and Persia. The first university establishments in the western world are thought to be University of Bologna (founded in 1088) and later Oxford University (founded around 1096). The Library of Alexandria was established in the third century BC, and over the five centuries of its existence transformed a predominantly oral, scholarly culture to portable and heritable written knowledge (McNeely & Wolverton, 2008). Initially, the library was the depository of Greek culture, but shortly after its establishment, included Hebrew texts translated to Greek and subsequently Christian texts. Along with the library, which included a systematized catalogue of information, a community of scholars was located within the museum. This community of scholars not only composed text, they also developed the basis for scholarly critique (Heller-Roazen, 2002). It is also suggested that the scholars with the museum gave public lectures to those outside the museum, disseminating knowledge and information (Argyle, 1974). The library and the museum provided the foundation of university, through the compilation, exploration, and dissemination of knowledge.

However, between the demise of the library and museum of Alexandria and the emergence of the medieval university, both monasteries and madrasahs were keepers and explorers of knowledge. Makdisi (1981) stressed that the madrasahs of Islamic Spain provided foundational elements

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