

# A Comparative Study of the Educational Systems in the United States and Saudi Arabia

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**Abstract:** Saudi Arabia and the U.S. both provide education for their citizens; however, there are significant differences between the two countries' systems through which they provide it. This study compares and contrasts the two systems at the secondary level. It provides a brief history of each system and their theoretical approaches to education, then compares the two based on history of education, curriculum, religion in schools, teacher preparation and advancement, structure of high schools, technology, special education, financial support, extracurricular activities, testing, and the classroom learning environment. The study was conducted using the Historical-Comparative Methodology due to the differences in societal and cultural norms. This method not only provided a comparison between the two educational systems, but it also provided information as to how and why the two systems changed over time, as well as how those differences and similarities impact goals and outcomes. Data was collected and analyzed from over thirty articles, databases and books that highlight studies, historical references, and current statistics in each category of education service in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia schools. The results showed that both systems are governed by a higher office, which creates the guidelines and regulations for education. Both also have a curriculum focus at the secondary level that is intended to provide students with rich and rigorous preparation for college or vocation. The two nations both foster technology, a high level of professional teacher training, and parental involvement in their systems. Differences include gender separation in Saudi schools, and the integration of culture and religion into its curriculum. Saudi Arabia has not adopted the Common Core Standards, and does not promote extracurricular activities. Differences in technology and teacher education also distinguish the two systems. The results also are used to identify the best practices that emerge from the study of the two systems.

## 1. Introduction

Throughout the years, the educational systems in both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia have changed. Overall, the U.S. educational system is extremely different from the educational system in Saudi Arabia. Education in the U.S. is primarily the responsibility of state and local government. Therefore, there is little standardization in the curriculum, finances, activities, school systems, technology, and extracurricular activities. On the other hand, the educational system in Saudi Arabia is primarily under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, which provides the same standardization in all educational areas for all states.

## 2. Overview of the U.S. Education System

The education system in the U.S. began to develop during the 17th century. This was during the British Colonial Period wherein colonies were required to follow a certain system in implementing education among the citizens. Then came the Revolution. This was when public Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 8 secondary schools came to life, further developing the education system in the country. This began in the state of Massachusetts, specifically in Boston, where one of the first schools was established. The history of secondary education in the country has come a long way. Nonetheless, it is important that the system be regularly evaluated and improved to stay consistent with the learning needs and capabilities of the students (Jeynes, 2007). Special education developed much later in the U.S. because the cost was seen as a disadvantage, which made special education a low priority. Schools in the U.S. education system are designed educate students from primary to secondary until tertiary levels. Public schools are provided by the government located in various localities, which are free for all citizens. There are private schools as well, most of which require the tuition payments. The curriculum in secondary schools is geared towards preparing students for college or career readiness. Teachers play an important role in the

education of these students; therefore, teachers are required to undergo formal training and earn state certification in teaching. Parents are also encouraged to be actively involved in the education of their children by providing them guidance and support in their academic studies outside of the school by attending school programs and parent conferences when necessary. For the holistic development of students, they are also encouraged to get involved in extracurricular activities such as sports and recreational activities or academic clubs (Jeynes, 2007).

## 3. Overview of the Saudi Arabian Education System

Education is considered as one of the most important elements that can help Saudi Arabia to meet the goals of development. The directorate of education was first established in Saudi Arabia in 1925 (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the U.S., 2006). Primary education in Saudi Arabia began in the 1930s. King Abdulaziz Al-Saud, the country's founder, began establishing schools in the Kingdom in 1945 (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2014). By 1951, Saudi Arabia

Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 9 had opened 226 schools with 29,887 students. The educational system in Saudi Arabia consists of the pre-elementary level, elementary level, intermediate level and secondary level (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the U.S., 2006). The secondary levels are divided into Regular Secondary Education, Vocational, and Technical Secondary Education. The secondary school education in Saudi Arabia is provided for three years. Students ages fifteen to nineteen attend and are educated with a general curriculum for the first year. The last two years, students focus on one of the following majors: administration and social Science, natural science and shariah and Arabic Studies. Students who earn high grades in mathematics and physical science by the 10<sup>th</sup> grade are supported to register in the program that focuses on

natural science (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the U.S., 2006).

The most prominent progress in the development of education was made in 1953 when the Ministry of Education was established. Major changes in the education system took place during the reign of King Fahd in 1982. King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz was the first minister of education in 1953. He provided the foundations for a successful education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The prominent progress included the creation of the Directorate General for Educational Technology and the Department of Production and Design. Developments were also made in the teacher certification and examination system as the examinations were transferred to individual schools from the intermediate schools. This change occurred to make teacher certification a required and rigorous process (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the U.S., 2006).

Changes in the public school curriculum in the subject areas of mathematics, social studies and science, developed gradually, and materials were modified for textbooks for male and female students. However, private institutes also had to follow the same textbooks used in government schools to provide education. Textbooks are provided without any cost to the

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Students of Saudi Arabia government schools. Supplementary books for subjects such as French, Spanish or other foreign languages except English are available in private schools only. All public schools have to follow the national curriculum criteria as well as the private schools. Private schools are afforded the opportunity to add additional courses (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the U.S., 2006).

In Saudi Arabia, the assessment in the higher education is made by the National Center of Assessment. The Qudrat test is one of the neuromas tests that provide for high school students. In simple words, Qudrat is an assessment test offered by the Ministry of Higher Education for high school graduates as a requirement for admission in Saudi Governmental Universities. Graduate admission tests are another system of assessing educational abilities of students (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010).

#### **4. Research Design**

This historical comparative research seeks to compare and contrast nations, cultures, societies, and institutions. Comparative educational studies examine the educational field in one country or group of countries by using data and analysis in another country, or countries. The purpose of using the comparative approach in this research is to identify, analyze, and explain similarities and differences across educational systems in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia.

##### **Definitions**

**ACT** is American College Testing, a standardized test given to high school students seeking college admissions.

**AP** is Advanced Placement, a system of college level coursework and exams created by The College Board and offered to high school students in the U.S.

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**CCSS** is the Common Core State Standards, a set of learning standards adopted by most U.S. states to prepare students for college and career.

**IDEA** is Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a federal law governing the policies in the education of children with disabilities.

**IEP** is the Individualized Education Plan is a document that is created for a special education student.

**NCATE** is the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education in the U.S.

**NCLD** is the National Center for Learning Disabilities, an organization representing and providing information for persons with disabilities and the institutions who serve them.

**Praxis®**: A series of tests taken by teachers seeking teacher certification in the U.S.

**SAT** is the Scholastic Aptitude Test, a standardized assessment used for college admissions in the U.S.

**Qudrat** is an assessment test offered by the Ministry of Higher Education for high school graduates as a requirement for admission in Saudi Governmental Universities.

**Hadith** are teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad.

**Eid Al-Adhais** the Islamic festival of sacrifice.

#### **Brief Summary of First Chapter**

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the research study of the educational systems in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. The educational systems in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia have seen many changes over the years. This paper presents a comparison of the secondary educational systems in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. In exploring this topic, this paper will trace the origin of education in both countries and present the unique characteristics of each educational system.

Chapter 2 will provide more information thorough the literature review of the educational systems for the two countries.

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### **5. Literature Review**

#### **History of Education in the U.S.**

According to the Institute of Education Sciences, there are currently 14.7 million students enrolled in U.S. public high schools in grades 9 through 12. The first high school in the U.S. was Boston Latin Grammar School. Boston Latin was founded in 1635 to prepare male students for college at Harvard University. Other public high schools were opened in New York and throughout New England with the primary goal to educate young men and keep the enrollment of students low. Women and minorities were not allowed entrance into these preparatory, public high schools in the U.S. In 1870, there were 500 public high schools with 50,000 students in the U.S. By 1910, only a small percentage of youth in the U.S. attended high school, roughly 10%.

Until the 20th century, secondary education in the United States was not democratic as it was an elite system for wealthy people (United States Department of Education, 2014). By the 1950s changes in American education and the push for equality and equal access to education for all students, found that minority and disabled students were not treated fairly. As a result, court cases were pursued and caused the institution of laws prohibiting discrimination and unequal access in American education. Supreme Court decisions in the cases of *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954 and the *Education of all Handicapped Children Act* of 1975 gave equal access to education for all students, including those with disabilities (United States Department of Education, 2014).

### Curriculum in U.S. Secondary Schools

Curriculums in U.S. schools at the secondary level are based on the curriculum materials and standards that a district follows from the state education department. The majority of U.S. schools have adopted the Common Core State Standards, a set of academic learning standards

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Created to prepare students for college and career readiness. The curriculum a school utilizes may be closely aligned with the Common Core State Standards or learning standards set forth by the state. Teachers use a variety of instructional practices to convey the curriculum for students.

Teachers follow the curriculum that is mandated so that each skill is covered by the standards. For example, New York State publishes a curriculum titled *Engage NY* for teachers to align lessons with the Common Core Standards and provide rigorous instruction for students. The module lessons provided are materials that teachers can edit and adapt to their students' needs and use frequently to assess student capabilities in understanding the standards (Engage NY, 2014). The *Engage NY* curriculum features modules with printed lessons and unit plans published in PDF format, and includes a list of reading materials, articles, books, poetry, and information text for students to read and analyze (Engage NY, 2014).

In addition to the Common Core State Standards, teachers in U.S. schools focus teaching 21st century learning skills. 21st Century skills are a set of skills that designated to evaluate student's ability to succeed in a digital age society (Thoughtful Learning, 2014). The 21st century learning skills include critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communicating, digital literacy, information literacy, social skills, productivity and leadership. The 21st century learning skills are those thought to impact future opportunities for students including college readiness and job placement in various industries and corporations. Students who master the 21st century learning skills will be able to communicate using the latest technology, problem solve for efficiency, collaborate well with others and acquire skills that will enhance their job advancement prospects in the future (Thoughtful Learning, 2014). The skills the students learn will help them to work and learn independently or within a group or team. Schools that have a

specialized focus may have a curriculum tailored to professions in law, journalism, health sciences, medicine or the performing arts. Vocational and technical high schools provide

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Curriculum and training in areas that would offer students job placement after high school graduation. Vocational high schools like *Minuteman Regional High School* in Massachusetts focus on skilled trades such as plumbing, carpentry and welding to provide students with gainful employment after high school graduation (Hanford, 2014).

### Religion in U.S. Secondary Schools

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution specifies that there is a separation of church and state in America. The First Amendment outlines that there is a free exercise of speech and religion in the U.S.; the government does not manage the freedom of religion or promote religion in schools (Legal Information Institute, 2014). There is not one religion that is preferred over another. The U.S. is a nation with diverse citizens of origin and culture residing in it. Public schools do not offer prayer or religious study, as it is deemed to be propaganda toward one religion or another. Although there have been court cases where students have sued their school district for their right to freely express and practice their beliefs in public schools, there are no laws, mandates or policies that suggest religion in schools will ever be supported in the U.S. unless the school is specifically a school that is designed for students and their families who are practicing Christians, Muslims, Catholics or other religions. Goldin (1999) claims that religious beliefs have been significant in fostering private and public education in the U.S. Schooling is a consumption good that allows people to gain understanding and enjoying the things around them.

Education serves various roles in polity, economy, community, religions, and lives of people (Goldin, 1999, p. 1).

### 6. Teacher Preparation and Advancement in the U.S.

Potential teachers must complete a number of important steps to become licensed and certified to teach in the U.S. Each state has requirements for teacher licensing, generally listed on the state education department's website and literature. Teachers of public schools must earn a

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Professional teaching license for the subject and grade they teach (North Carolina Public Schools, 2014). Teacher certification in the U.S. includes passing teacher certification exams, obtaining a bachelor's degree, post-secondary education and student teaching. States require mentoring for new teachers and in many cases, student teaching (TEACH, 2014). Student teaching involves a teacher candidate, shadowing and being mentored by an experienced teacher in the classroom. The teacher candidate may help plan, teach lessons, and observe teaching practices while learning. Teacher preparation, skill

and effectiveness are important for student achievement. Studies have shown student achievement gains are impacted by teachers being licensed in their subject area and learning new practices that enhance their instruction (NCATE, 2014). Teachers who have obtained complete teacher certification including a bachelor's and master's degree in the subject area that they teach are considered to be "highly qualified" in most U.S. states. Some states may offer an initial or provisional certification to a teacher, for a period while the teacher completes degree coursework and exams for certification (NCATE, 2014).

Alternative teacher certification programs such as Teach for America and New York City Teaching Fellows allow prospective teachers to attain teaching positions while earning an education degree or taking specialized certification courses on a part-time basis. Many teachers are using alternative teacher education programs or alternative routes to certification. Those who are in support of alternative routes to teacher certification believe that these programs help to widen the population of teachers to attract a diverse group of teacher candidates who may not otherwise apply in the field (Allen, 2003). Through alternative programs, a teacher is able to teach while completing degree requirements or exams necessary for teacher certification.

According to a 2003 report on strategies for training U.S. teachers, successful alternative teacher certification programs include partnership with school districts and teacher preparation programs that help in the screening and selection process for strong teacher candidates. These methods

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include mentoring and support for curriculum training so that teachers are best prepared to assume full time teaching responsibilities (Allen, 2003). Teacher exams for certification include Praxis I and II, along with other assessments that are used to evaluate prospective teachers' abilities toward being state certified and license to teach their respective subject matter (Teach, 2014).

Many U.S. school districts and state education departments have a mission statement that includes requirements for teacher certification and preparation. According to the Maryland State Department of Education, the mission is improve achievement outcomes for students by setting certification standards that encourage essential skills and knowledge mastery as set forth by the State Board of Education (Maryland State Department of Education, 2014).

Advancement for a teacher is influenced by the number of years a teacher has taught, professional development training, advanced degrees, and leadership duties at the school where they teach. Teachers who do well in their position may be offered various opportunities at the school or district level. Schools invest in teacher advancement when teachers are chosen to serve as teacher leaders who share their teaching practices and lesson plans to help advance the professional development of their less experienced colleagues (White, 2014).

### **Structure of U.S. High Schools**

In the U.S., almost 90% of the students below college level attend elementary as well as secondary schools. All states in the U.S. require young individuals to obtain education. Secondary or high school generally means grades 9 to 12, or ages 14 to 18 (APEC, 2014).

Generally, in the U.S. high school attendance is five days of the week (Monday through Friday), nine months of the year. Students spend 7-8 hours in the school every day, including a break for lunch. The school year begins in all states from mid-August to late September, and generally ends from mid-May to late June. There are two major breaks during the school year,

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Which are winter vacation or Christmas vacation usually 2-1/2 weeks in December, and Spring Break, a week-long holiday in late March.

## **7. Standardized Testing and Assessment in U.S. Schools**

According to Educational Leadership, standardized tests are exams administered to students at all grade levels of students and scored in a standardized format (Popham, 1999). Standardized testing has become a norm in U.S. schools for education reform and alignment with the rigorous Common Core State Standards. Students in grades 3-8 and grades 9-10 are given standardized tests to measure their aptitude in reading, math, science, and social studies each year. U.S. students are accustomed to taking many standardized tests and assessments throughout their academic careers. These tests include: SAT (grades 9 to 12), MAT (grade 8), Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), or TerraNova Assessment Series (CTBS grade 5 and CA STAR), FCAT in Florida, TAKS in Texas, and MCAS in Massachusetts (Time for Learning, 2014). Students seeking to gain entrance into a U.S. college or University must take the ACT (American College Testing) or SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) exam by the final year of high school or grade 12.

Additionally, high school students who intend to earn college credits before they enroll in college, and who are already taking AP (Advanced Placement) courses, may take AP exams in the Spring of their sophomore (grade 10) or junior (grade 11) year (The College Board, 2014). Some education critics and parents believe that there is too much standardized testing in U.S. schools and textbook publishers who write the tests do not consider the students for whom they create the tests. The widely known textbook company, Pearson was criticized for taking passages directly from their textbooks, and using them on student standardized assessments (The Atlantic, 2014). According to The Atlantic, many poor schools and students who are disadvantaged do not have access to the textbooks that would help them study and understand the content on standardized assessments (The Atlantic, 2014). Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 18

**Classroom Learning Environment in U.S. Schools**

Highly effective classrooms in U.S. schools focus on student centered learning. Students are allowed to pose questions and participate in debates. According to the article, "10 Characteristics of a Highly Effective Learning Environment" teachers who encourage questioning in the classroom show that they value inquiry among their students (Heick, 2014). The support for a learning environment that meets the needs of all students and encourages creative and critical thinking is a part of the U.S. schools' learning environment. Teachers who instill confidence and love for learning enable students to succeed. Students thrive academically when they receive challenging work that improves their sense of connection to what they are learning (Robinson, Silver & Strong, 1995). The classroom learning environment reveals a variety of teaching practices to serve all students and learning styles. Teachers trained in higher order thinking skills who can implement real world experiences in the classroom have higher likelihoods of student achievement in the classroom (NCATE, 2014). Teachers consider the grade level, learning standards and specific students in the classroom, to create the best learning environment. A focus on personalized instruction and support for inquiry based learning is also included for effective learning environments. The classroom environment is another way to evaluate teachers. Many district evaluation tools used by schools, measure a teacher's effectiveness and efforts for students by the learning and physical environment of the classroom.

If a classroom is unorganized, unclean or lacking in routines and structure for students, this is not viewed as a positive learning space for students (NCATE, 2014).

**Extracurricular Activity in U.S. Schools**

The majority of U.S. secondary schools offer extracurricular activities for students. These activities include but are not limited to music, academic clubs, arts, and sports. Extracurricular activities in schools teach students aspects of team collaboration, accountability, physical health, Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 19 awareness of diversity, and a sense of community among peers (Institute of Education Sciences, 1995). Students who participate in extracurricular activities are given a chance to apply what they learn in the academic subjects, within a culture that connects to real world understandings to support students to become balanced with academics and activities (Institute of Education Sciences, 1995). Activities outside of the academic classroom help students develop confidence, reasoning and decision making skills, a chance to display talents and abilities they may not otherwise reveal and the opportunity to development leadership skills. Much of the extracurricular activities in sports and academics begin at the high school level, but others start in middle school. Additional activities include drama and theater club, newspaper or journalism club, Spanish, French, Latin, or German language club, photography, dance, art club, National Honor Society, poetry club, creative writing, pep squad, cheerleading, and sports such as golf, tennis, rugby, basketball, swimming, baseball, football, softball, track, volleyball, and book club (Institute of Education Sciences, 1995).

U.S. students who want to attend college are highly encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities throughout high school because activity involvement makes them more desirable for college application acceptance. Extracurricular activities enhance a student's likelihood of college admissions, as college admissions offers look highly upon the skills a student acquired while participating in additional school activities (Fortenbury, 2011). Colleges are interested in the activities a student previously participated in during the high school years because it gives a different viewpoint of the student outside of achievement. According to The College Board, extracurricular activities help students develop valuable parts of themselves that cannot be measured or evaluated by grades and achievement tests (The College Board, 2014).

Students may be asked to choose activities that interest them and ones where they have a talent or passion for the skills involved because they will spend a lot of time participating in the Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 20 activity. Students are encouraged to understand that extracurricular activities are participated in on a volunteer basis and do require a great amount of time outside of academic duties (Fortenbury, 2011).

There are many benefits for secondary students who participate in extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities also have a positive impact on student behavior. Students who are active in extracurricular activities have less negative behaviors (Massoni, 2011). For example, students who participate in sports have practices, drills, routines, and responsibilities that build their character and self-esteem. Students take pride in their accomplishments when they are rewarded for good things they do (Massoni, 2011). Students earn the feeling of pride when they have taken responsibility for something and have been rewarded for it. Student achievement increases with participation in extracurricular activities. Students have higher self-esteem and positive attitude in school which leads to better academic success overall (Massoni, 2011).

Students do not earn grades for the extracurricular activities as they usually take place after school, but the activities provide students with a positive outlet and additional credentials for college applications. According to a 2005 College Board research report student who stay after school participate in many activities including music, art, drama, athletics, and academic clubs (Everson & Millsap, 2005).

**Technology in U.S. Schools**

U.S. schools utilize technology to help prepare students with 21st century learning skills. Increased technology usage helps students to understand how to think critically and communicate in a highly digital world and society. Examples of technology in the classroom include Smart Board, laptops, projects, document based cameras, iPads, and overhead projectors.

Additionally, some teachers utilize learning labs where students gain practice in math or English Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 21 using computer programs such as TeenBiz 3000 or iReady. TeenBiz 3000 uses information text

to boost student literacy, by providing activities that will provoke students to argue with evidence, use critical thinking skills, write and speak to show understanding of the learning standards (Achieve 3000, 2014). These programs boost students' skills and reading levels and to prepare them for standardized assessments. Students are already using technology on their own through smartphones and social media, which is an added reason for schools to teach students using the latest technology. Some of the printed curriculum in textbooks and handbooks come with audio and video companions. These resources help teachers differentiate the learning material to meet the needs of all students. Teachers use Quizlet on an iPad or laptop to give students practice before a quiz or a test. Quizlet allows teachers to guide their students in the use of free, online flashcards featuring challenging vocabulary and activities suited for each grade level (Teaching with iPad, 2013).

### **Parent Involvement in U.S. Schools**

Parent and family involvement is an important component for student achievement in U.S. schools. Parent involvement is seen as an important component in a student's educational process (Johnson, 2013). Schools considering how to influence student achievement depend on parents as supporters. According to a University of Memphis study, schools understand that parent involvement means increased opportunities to collaborate with parents and improve student achievement outcomes over time (McNeal, Sanders-Lawson & Watson, 2012). Although all students may not live with a parent, extended family members and caretakers are included. Parent involvement can have a positive impact on student attendance, academic achievement, and prevention of student dropout rates at the high school level. Research shows that positive student success, including higher grades and test scores, can be a direct outcome of parental involvement (Thao, 2009).

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Examples of parent involvement in U.S. schools include parent notification by schools and participation in parent-teacher conference, open school night, chaperoning for field trips, IEP conferences, parent and family potluck at school and attendance at student dances, theater, sports and arts events. Additionally, some parents enjoy participating as volunteers and fundraisers for their child's school. Schools that are open to parent volunteers may utilize the parents as classroom aides, or chaperones for field trips. Parent-Teacher Associations offer the opportunity for parents to work together with teachers to plan and implement new programs and activities for students. In schools where parent involvement is low, students may show signs of underachieving, repeated lateness to school or absences. Schools may communicate with parents through email, printed newsletters and letters sent home with students. Parents of children who receive special education services are required to attend meetings where a student's IEP (Individualized Education Plan) document is being changed or reviewed. Parents have the right to give input in their child's education and understand the evaluations that are being made on behalf of the student, regardless of the age and grade level. Parent involvement can prevent low academic performance and negative student behavior (Child Trends Data Bank, 2013).

### **Special Education in U.S. Schools**

Special education services in the U.S. focus on meeting the specialized needs of students requiring additional support services due to their disabilities. Services designated for students who require additional supports can be given in a variety of settings (Understood, 2014). The governing laws and policies for special education come from The Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA). These laws require for public schools to give services to any child who meets criteria for disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21 in the United States (Understood, 2014). Students who will receive special education services must have a documented disability and show that they have a need for additional help to access general education. Students who are

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designated for special services are evaluated at their school, with the parents' permission, and if found to have a disability, are given an IEP – Individualized Education Plan in order to document their disability and establish goals for the student. Special education services teams are required by law to evaluate and maintain records on all special education students. Teams of special educators work with classroom teachers to evaluate and provide learning supports for the students in and outside of the classroom. Students who receive special services can be educated in a general, inclusion setting with other students. The students may have an aide or co-teacher who supports them along with the general classroom teacher. Some disabilities that may require a student to have special services in U.S. schools include dyslexia, ADD, ADHD, autism, OCD and ED. The disabilities may interfere with students' learning and comprehension, and some disability may require medication and ongoing therapies outside of school (Understood, 2014).

### **Financial Support of U.S. Schools**

States receive federal funding for public schools in the U.S. Each district is given a budget and school superintendents and school principal are expected to manage the budget for schools in order to pay for books and curriculum, technology, operational expense, building maintenance, student activities and other needs. There are specific federal funding and accountability measures regulated by the federal government for schools receiving federal aid. Title I is one such segment of federal funding, intended for schools that are located in high poverty areas in the U.S., serving the educational needs of underserved students from low economic status background. The Title I funding gives financial support to schools who serve children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet academic requirements in the state (United States Department of Education, 2014). Schools that receive Title I funding cannot engage in practices that require students or their families to pay for educational resources or materials, including field trips, lunches and transportation. Schools that receive this type of federal funding provide textbooks and materials, pay for educational field trips and offer free breakfast and lunch in school cafeterias for students. Additionally, schools that are designated as Title I in high poverty areas may have a high population of students who are homeless or in foster

care, and therefore require additional resources from the school to receive their education. Private schools are owned and controlled by private entities and these schools are not affiliated with the government. Private schools, including those with a religious focus such as Catholic schools, charge tuition, but may offer scholarships for students in need (United States Department of Education, 2014).

### **History of Saudi Arabian School System**

According to statistics, 33,000 public schools in Saudi Arabia are educating 6 million students (International Center for Religion & Diplomacy, 2014). Education for women in Saudi Arabia was conducted at home through the assistance of a female instructor and learning was oriented around the study of the Holy Quran and understanding of the Islamic Law. It was in 1960 when the modern period of education for women started, three decades following the start of men's education in Saudi Arabia (Calvert & Al-Shetaiwi, 113). Education in Saudi Arabia was not made compulsory yet; it was open to all, especially to those who wished to take part in getting education in a government school. Nonetheless, the government offered free technical, general, vocations, as well as higher education with monetary incentives for all students in some fields of education and in technical, technological, vocational, and higher education. Free transportation was given for all females (Calvert & Al-Shetaiwi, 113). From that time, the number of women participating in education in Saudi increased from 5200 in 1960 to over two million female students in 1999 (Calvert & Al-Shetaiwi, 113).

Prior to 1973, girls in Saudi focused on domestic duties such as being a mother and a wife. In 1973, some schools began to develop designing and sewing centers (Calvert & Al-Shetaiwi, Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 25 118). In 1991, the General Presidency for Girls' Education (GPGE) formally became the leader of technical and vocational education for women in both the private and public sector took control over technical and vocational education for women both private and public sector. The organization ensured that women were capable of meeting the demands of the labor market (Calvert & Al-Shetaiwi, 118). In addition, the organization intends to acknowledge and place value in the function of women in society by creating and improving their skills and giving them special abilities to enable women to take part in the labor market by developing new opportunities (Calvert & Al-Shetaiwi, 118).

In Saudi Arabia, women's schooling in elementary, secondary, and even up to college remained under the supervision of the Department of Religious Guidance until the year 2002 (Hamdan, 2005, p. 44). The Ministry of Education managed the education for male students. This was to guarantee that the education intended for women did not deviate from the initial and primary purpose of education among women, which was to make them good mothers and good wives, and to prepare them for acceptable employment such as nursing and teaching that were thought to best suit the characteristics of their genders (Hamdan, 2005, p. 44).

### **Curriculum in Saudi Arabian Secondary Schools**

The curricula is used throughout the educational organization in Saudi Arabia constantly undergoes modification and improvements in response to social and economic growths in the Kingdom as well as international developments in technology. National committees recognized by the Ministry of Education are devoted to curriculum growth and review and advise the Educational Development Department of the Ministry (Robert, 2001).

These groups study the topics being taught in schools at different stages, including special topics such as adult education, measurement and testing, special education, audio-visual aids, and Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 26 scholar guidance and counseling. There have been many innovations in curriculum development in the final several years such as the growth of new textbooks for elementary and secondary teaching. Schools have been outfitted with a variety of audio-visual media, including video monitors, data processors, slide and overhead projectors, and school broadcasting facilities that have been incorporated into the teaching of math, science discipline, and geography. School libraries have been converted into comprehensive educational resource centers stocked with books, reference works, papers, maps, posters, and pictures. Textbooks are updated periodically to reflect developments in different subjects. Text materials in areas such as math, science, and social subjects, nevertheless, are reevaluated even more regularly. Similar textbooks are used by male and female pupils who also stick with the same academic curricula. It is compulsory that private schools employ the same textbooks and curricula employed in the public school. The government provides textbooks to private schools free. Supplementary texts are sometimes employed by private schools for the extra field of studies that are not available in the public schools such as English or French as a foreign linguistic communication (Robert, 2001).

During the first year, secondary students share a general curriculum. In the final two years, they are separated into scientific and literary streams. Students scoring 60% in all first year subjects may choose courses between the two streams. Those who score below 60% must opt for the literary streams. The first year general curriculum includes Arabic, biology, chemical science, English, geography, history, home economics (for young women), math, geology (for boys), computer sciences, and religious studies. Literary secondary curriculum includes Arabic language and literature, English, general culture, geography, history, religious subjects. Literary education uses the same curriculum as the general education system, but the emphasis on religious subjects is much more pronounced (Robert, 2001).

### **Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 27**

Prior to the formation of a small audio-visual unit within the Ministry of education in 1959, Educational Technology did not exist. Thus, in the same year there was a statement by the International Yearbook of Education concerning the presentation of a small audio-visual production program. Between 1964 and 1971, the major change, which took place in Saudi education, was the presentation of a graphic and the illustrations unit for limited manufacture of slides,

filmstrips, photography, transparencies, and silk screen prints. To execute Educational Technology, the Saudi Government sought foreign specialist recommendations and cooperation. In the year 1985, the General Administration of Educational Technology within the new Educational Development Department presented a large change in the Saudi education system (Al-Asmari, 2005).

### **Religion in Saudi Arabian Schools**

Islamic believes encourage people to acquire an education in Saudi Arabia. Islam strongly encourages humans, both men and women, to acquire knowledge in all fields of life, as well as to research and reach the facts. In Saudi Arabia, education is a requirement for every person, both male and female. The Holy Qur'an and the Hadith repeatedly emphasize the importance of learning. According to a 2012 report on religious freedom in Saudi Arabia, "According to the 1992 Basic Law, Sunni Islam is the official religion and the country's constitution is the Quran and the Sunna (traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad)" (United States Department of State, 2012). Public education in Saudi Arabia is "designed to engender a deep Islamic faith in students using a rigid religious and social science curriculum, developed and disseminated under the watchful eye of the Salafist Ulama" (International Center for Religion & Diplomacy, 2014). Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 28

### **Teacher Preparation and Advancement in Saudi Arabia**

Focusing the educational development in Saudi Arabia, teacher training has also been integrating new strategies with technologies. In the last five decades, the teaching standard has been improved by the mean of integration. Teacher requirements have also improved as now only four years bachelor's degree holder are applicable for teaching. Now universities and colleges are expected to cover more subjects in the curriculum. Separate departments for different subjects have also been introduced such as mathematics, biology, physics and chemistry. Moreover, concerning the better foreign relations, English, Arabic, and Islamic studies (Loe, 2012).

### **Structure of Saudi Arabian High Schools**

Secondary education is the final stage of education that lasts for three years (World Data on Education, 2010). Students in this stage are educated in grades 10-12 and upon completion, they receive an intermediate school certificate. The high school systems in Saudi Arabia are the same in all states; school attendance is for five days of the week (Sunday through Thursday). Nine months (180 instruction days) of the year. Students spend 8 hours in the school, including a break for breakfast. The school year in all states starts in the same date in the end of August and finishes in the end of June. There are two main breaks through the school year, which are Eid Al-Adha typically 12 days and spring break 10 days.

### **Standardized Testing and Assessment in Saudi Arabian Schools**

Tests in Saudi Arabia are used exclusively for the sake of assessing the scholar's performance with regard to what has been taught; they are "achievement tests" They are school based tests, constructed and designed by the school's

instructors. From the researcher's experience as a teacher of this stage, teachers always follow the instructions and the grading scheme of the General Directorate of Education (GDE) in designing their tests. The results of the test form a source on which the teacher plans his future work. In minor year 1, language tests are split into Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 29 two parts: an oral examination, which gauges in the listening and speaking skills; and a written exam, which includes the skills associated with grammar, reading, vocabulary, and composition.

As noted above, the teachers always follow the GDE's instructions and labeling scheme in designing their tests. According to the GDE's instructions, 45 marks are allocated to the written test and the remaining five marks are for the oral test (Hughes, 1989). Secondary education in Saudi Arabia lasts three years and this is the final level of general education. After the intermediate education, scholarly people accept the opportunity for both universal and specialized secondary education. A minimum overall average of 65% on a test is needed for access to upper secondary teaching. Scholars are awarded a Secondary Diploma Certificate upon completing the official tests provided and handled by each school. Applying for the Secondary Diploma is obtainable in all schools, public, private, and international (Hughes, 1989).

Now, students are admissible to higher education on the footing of the terminations of their General Secondary School/Education Transcript and the new placement tests (General Aptitude Test/GAT or Standard Achievement Admission Test/SAAT) produced by the National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education (NCAHE/QIYAS) (Hughes, 1989).

### **Classroom Learning Environment in Saudi Arabian Schools**

In Saudi Arabia, there is a great dispute between the classroom environment in public and private schools. Public schools are equipped with the latest technological instructional tools and equipment and they can complete the private schools as the Model Schools and Aramco Schools. A teacher can be as creative and forward-thinking as possible because all class environments are given teaching aids, technological tools and media resources. The government sets a large budget for the Ministry of Education, however principals of the high schools do not spend according to the schools' needs. Likewise, on that point is no observation and a grave following up for the Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 30 financial distribution of the educational budget. The result is not having well prepared schools with instructional technology (Alghadeer, 2014).

The Ministry's principals complain about not receiving orders and reports about the schools' needs. Some reasons for a schools' lack of educational technology are that some teachers like the traditional class environment, while others desire more technology. This is despite the training teachers have received for computer courses and Microsoft Office Applications including PowerPoint. Teachers, who are more traditional, do not request the additional teaching aids or

classrooms with instructional technology. The government begins to offer e-class options, online courses in some schools and plans to use the project in all schools later. The schools apply the e-learning in a technical environment with full electronic equipments and installations. In these classrooms, teachers will use electronic texts, e-portfolios, e-mail, and talk forums with their students, upload and download files of the course and have forums to exchange thoughts and info between the teacher and the apprentices (Mirza, 2006).

#### Extracurricular Activity in Saudi Arabian Schools

Saudi secondary schools generally do not have a diversity of extracurricular activities. Now, however, Saudi schools emphasize extracurricular activities, including sportsmen and a variety of other clubs. In general, boys' schools are more likely to boast large soccer fields, basketball courts, and swimming pools for students' sport teams. Educators hope that sports teams and guilds will help of students' involvement in their training because both activities represent academic and real-life skills. Holding students' interest is important to government leadership and school officials, who recognized that the nation's relies on the preparedness and skills of its current students (Franken, 2007).

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#### Technology in Saudi Arabian Schools

Similarly to U.S. schools, Saudi Arabia has introduced new technology to teachers and students. SMART Tables is utilized to integrate technology in the classroom to improve student learning. The Smart Table helps students to learn through digital communication while they collaborate with their classmates during the lesson (Almaki, Finger & Zagami, 2013). Smart Tables is a multi-touch, interactive learning center with wireless computer capabilities. Students learn through digital lessons and collaborate with other students in teams, to problem solve and participate in educational games. There is a need for better technology in classrooms in Saudi Arabia. According to a survey, education specialists believe that teaching methods can be improved by incorporating more technology in the classroom, by an increase of teachers being willing to ask for and receive training on the technology (Jiffry, 2013).

The Ministry of Education provides e-books for most tracks and can practice them on their smart computers as the iPhone, I pad and I pod and all unusual kinds of them. CDs are available for all students and instructors. The Ministry of Education uses the Electronic Educational Management Project (Noor) which enables scholars to start out their answers, grades and marks electronically and sends SMS to their parents around their attendance, their behaviors, and breaking news about the school. Thither are three kinds of interactive classrooms in a few schools and the Ministry of Education intends to employ them at all schools as presently as possible.

- 1) The Interactive Electronic Classroom that includes e-panel, a computer and data display.
- 2) The Cooperative Electronic Classroom that contains e-panel, a computer, data show and 5 computers for students.

- 3) The Complete Electronic Classroom that contains e-panel, a computer, data show and 25 computers for students at a max number. All these varieties of interactive classrooms use the electronic teaching aids, tools, and e-books. The Saudi government tries to maintain stride

Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 32 with technology development and acceleration developed the National Plan for Communications and Information Technology (Mirza, 2006).

#### Parent Involvement in Saudi Arabian Schools

Many Saudi parents are in direct touch with their children's school and are aware of their academic progress. Parental involvement has been advocated as a major contributor to children's academic achievement. Maternal engagement in children's education has been identified as an important facet of the relationship between schools and children, families, with significant contributions to children's education. In Saudi Arabia amplifying parental involvement in children's education is the first means to improve academic achievement and development. Research has clearly linked parental involvement to positive educational effects and academic success, including more positive attitudes towards school, better levels of understand, and higher test scores (Simon, 2004).

#### Special Education in Saudi Arabian Secondary Schools

The population of students with multiple or severe disabilities receiving special education services in Saudi Arabia is 96% of students as of 2007–08 (Alquraini, 2011). There is an early history of the surge to provide education services for children with disabilities in Saudi Arabia. Al-Noor Institute in Riyadh, the first government supported training institute for blind male students was opened in 1960 (SACM, 2006). The Saudi Arabia Ministry of Education established the Department of Special Learning in 1962, provides educational services for students who experience deafness, mental retardation and blindness (Alquraini, 2011). The Ministry of Education opened the institute for blind male students and in 1964 founded the first school for blind girls. Also in 1964, the Amal Institute in Riyadh was opened to educate and provide training for deaf and hearing-impaired children (2006). Institutes for blind students grew to five schools. Al-Tarbiyah Al Fikriyah Institute in Riyadh, became the first institute in 1971 to Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 33 specialize for children with mental disability. Since 1987 schools for blind, deaf and mentally challenged students have grown to serve different provinces and location in Saudi Arabia. Students with mild learning disabilities that can be managed in a general classroom setting, receive support from special education services such as source rooms (Alquraini, 2011).

Additionally, through the Ministry of Education, special education students have an IEP (Individual Education Plan) that lists the special services for modified curriculum and support needs for disabilities that are required for the student (Alquraini, 2011).

### Financial Support of Saudi Arabian Schools

In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Education sets overall standards for the country's educational system (public and private). The government finances public schools and the tuition is free (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission to the U.S., 2006); whereas the private schools are financed by private entities and they require tuition fees. The curriculums and religious instruction are same in both schools, however, private schools provide extra activities and several languages. The Ministry of Education sets for the finance budget for principals and schools. School resources such as books, technology, furnishings and other student needs are provided for with this budget (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission to the U.S., 2006).

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## 8. Conclusion

The educational systems of the U.S. and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, were used in a Historical Comparative Study to study and analyze the history, policies, structures and procedures of the deliverance of public secondary school education in both nations. The comparison study was found to be the best mode of research methodology due to the contrasting features of both nations and their educational systems. Although there are some similarities, the variety of difference in the histories and practices of each educational system cannot be ignored.

The U.S. and Saudi Arabia are two countries with contrasting differences in culture, religion and population of student demographics they each serve. Additionally there are some differences in the grade levels and description for curriculum focus and intended goals for curriculum. Each nation had their own unique history and story of the founding of the first schools and education departments in the nations. Corresponding laws and policies to regulate each aspect of education for students in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia were apparent through the study. The comparison study supports the research process of considering the differences and similarities in the educational systems of two nations and understanding how those differences and similarities impact the outcomes of secondary educational for both countries.

### Similarities between the U.S. and Saudi Arabian Education Systems

The U.S. and Saudi Arabia educational systems are both governed by a higher office, creating the guidelines and regulations for education throughout each nation. The Ministry of Education is the highest governing body, regulating education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Its founding in the early stages of Saudi Arabia to date has ensured the quality of education used to serve the students of Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the maintenance of schools and graduation requirements in addition to regulations for teacher education and certification. Similarly, the U.S. government within the U.S. Department of Education has set forth policies and federal funding used to serve the needs of states who govern the educational process. The U.S. federal government gives states a measure of authority to regulate state learning standards, teacher certification and school district operations

for the benefit of students. Additionally, it is a the state level that school districts are required to convey and ensure graduation guidelines and receipt of diploma for all secondary students who complete the graduation requirements for high school.

The U.S. and Saudi Arabia educational systems both have a curriculum focus at the secondary level that is intended to provide students with a rich and rigorous preparation for college or vocation. Both nations offer students who show talent and high achievement in certain core subjects to take advanced courses or progress to the next grade level at an earlier pace. For example, students who show high academic aptitude in the U.S. are encouraged to enroll in AP (Advanced Placement) courses that may earn them college credit by their senior (grade 12) of college. Each educational system has strict policies and guidelines for serving the needs of students who are designated for special education services, through internal school and external Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 41 home supports. This is very important because all students deserve the opportunity for a quality education in the general class setting.

Technology usage in the classroom is supported in both systems, as Saudi Arabia's system supports the use of SMART Tables and other technologies and U.S. system includes the use of SmartBoards in the classroom. Teacher training and development is an aspect of education that is taken very seriously in each nation. Teachers are required to receiving the appropriate training and certification in both nations. The accomplishments of knowledge of teachers is directly correlated to the knowledge and achievement level of the students. Each country's system of teacher training requires teachers to complete a formal education and obtain teacher certification in his or her intended subject of teaching. Parent involvement is encouraged in both nations, as researched cited reveals parent input and activity in a child's education helps the student to have motivation and a commitment to learning through each level phase.

### Differences between the U.S. and Saudi Arabian Education Systems

The differences in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia educational systems are related to overall culture in each nation and what each country finds value in. The stages of education in Saudi Arabia consist of boys and girls being educated separately for the majority years of education. Although both Saudi Arabia and the U.S. in their early history, provided boys with a separate education, Saudi Arabia continued to provide education to boys and girls separately. The U.S. educational system grew to be inclusive of girls, in addition to later, women and minority students.

Religion is not widely promoted or practiced in U.S. schools, including secondary schools, yet the practice of the religions faith of Islam is interwoven in the educational curriculum and focus for all of its students. The U.S. does not by law, allow teachers or students to practice or promote one religion in public schools. There are many people of different cultures Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 42 and religious faith in the U.S., yet there is no one focus on a religion in schools. This is due to the First Amendment

law stating there will be a “separation of church and state” in America.

Therefore the government does not determine or encourages religious practice of its citizens in the U.S. This is a different focus from the Saudi Arabia system. The curriculum in the U.S. has moved to a set of learning standards, adopted by state education departments, called the Common Core State Standards. The CCSS are a set of learning standards promoted in public schools to prepare students for college and career readiness at the secondary level. Saudi Arabia has a focus on curriculum that is intended to prepare students for a professional life and career, but they have not adopted the Common Core State Standards. According to the criteria developed by the Ministry of Education the standard curriculum focusing on mastery of science, mathematics, language and social studies is given to secondary students in Saudi Arabia. Extracurricular activities are a major part of the U.S. educational system. Students participate in many team sports, academic and arts clubs and other activities. The activities take place after school hours, on school grounds, and may involve student travel. The school sponsors the activities and families can contribute and support their child’s participation. U.S. colleges and Universities look highly at high school students who have engaged in extracurricular activities, believing it shows the students to be well rounded with an ability to pursue multiple goals and succeed. In contrast, Saudi Arabia schools do not push students to engage in extra, outside activities.

Although technology is used in Saudi Arabia classrooms, teachers are not required to use it and some even have expressed that they do not wish to use it. Technology is a near requirement in U.S. schools, as the school districts believe that in order to prepare students to use 21st century Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 43 skills for college, career and at a global level, students must be well practiced along with teachers, in the use and adaptation of technology resources in the classroom.

Due to teacher shortages and in order to quickly prepare teachers for rigors of teaching for highly populated schools, teachers in the U.S. are recruited from alternative programs that help to fill the teacher workforce, but the teachers are not usually certified when they begin teachers. Saudi Arabia teachers are trained and developed to receive their proper certification before taking a full time teaching assignment. Teachers in the U.S. use both traditional and nontraditional routes of completing their education and gaining state certification to teach.

## 9. Suggestions for Additional Research

Additional research would include the: (1) effectiveness of teachers who earn certification through non-traditional routes in the U.S. versus those who earn certification through traditional routes in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia (2) the student achievement outcomes by specific standardized testing by grade 12 of secondary schools in both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia educational systems and (3) the impact of current learning standards and curriculum focus on students who plan to attend college versus those who plan to pursue a vocation upon high school graduation. The four additional

research foci will highlight strengths and weakness in the teacher effectiveness, teacher preparation and curriculum standards of the U.S. and Saudi Arabia educational systems. Each of these additional research foci would enable the research to learn more about current trends and policies for the educational systems of the U.S. and Saudi Arabia nations. Additionally, the Historical Comparison methodology would still be used to discover the differences and similarities of these items for each educational system that is studied. The additional research would provide an in depth view into government functions, teacher education programs and effectiveness of overall educational focus of these two nations as stated in the previous chapters. More research can be reviewed to understand the core values of each educational system and learn how each system may intend to serve students with its resources in the future. Running head: EDUCATION SYSTEMS 45

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