

Chapter 8

Technical and Vocational Education in Jordan's Higher Education System

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ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines Jordan's higher education landscape highlighting the development of technical and vocational education and training, reflected in the development of community colleges in the country. The risks, challenges, and opportunities in regard to higher education are outlined and examined closely. This chapter also strives to uncover the key challenges that exist in higher education access for the large refugee population in Jordan and the plight of women in higher education in Jordan. Finally, some recommendations have been made to improve the higher education system by increasing access for the populations, particularly refugees and women, traditionally deprived of economic opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Jordan, otherwise known as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is made up of vibrant blend of native Jordanians and refugees from the surrounding countries. As early as 1947, Jordan opened its doors to refugees from around the Middle East, starting with Palestinian refugees seeking safe spaces during the Palestinian war. More recently, in 2011, Syrian refugees sought refuge in Jordan because of the country's open policies. Education is a concern not only for Jordanian natives, but these large refugee populations as well. Jordanians started to take an interest in expanding and ensuring the quality of their education systems in 1958, only six years after gaining independence from the British. The first teacher institute or teacher house, "Dar Al-Mu'Lemeen" was established in 1958, and it provided teacher training for the first higher education institutions in Jordan. In 1962, Jordan's first university, The University of Jordan, was established which sparked decades of progress in Jordan's higher education system. Currently, Jordan

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has 10 public universities, 17 private universities, and 51 community colleges (MOHE Website). The first community college was established in 1951, Amman Teachers Training College in Jordan (Al-Tal, Ashour, & Katsinas, 1993).

Even though Arab region is considered the cradle of civilization, Jordan's history of modern higher education is not long. The development of broad-based, accessible postsecondary education was conceived only during the 1980s and 1990s. Higher education was mostly elitist until then with a highly selective and expensive university system mostly confined in major cities. As the country moved to expand postsecondary education opportunity for the masses, Jordan found American community college model to suit their country. A wider reach of postsecondary institutions was felt necessary to implement the national plans for economic development.

Community colleges helped open access and foster social mobility by bringing low- and middle-income families to the national mainstream of economic development. The idea of the American community college was adopted by Jordan because of its "flexibility, diversity, and quality" (Al-Tal, Ashour, & Katsinas, 1993, p. 53). These characteristics were particularly appealing to Jordanian educators in early 1960s because of the backdrop British and French colonial rule, which only offered rigidity in educational structures. Even though most of the Arab countries developed two-year college systems along the more specialized technical and polytechnical models found in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, Jordan is one of the few countries to adopt the American model of community college, along with Saudi Arabia, and Oman.

Although Jordan seems to be somewhat of a titan in the higher education system for such a small country, there are many issues with the rate at which universities are opening and the quality of education in Jordan. Underrepresentation, strict placement tests, high tuition costs, limited scholarship opportunities, and qualifications are all barriers to higher education in Jordan. Refugees, women, and people of lower socio-economic status are arguably the most disadvantaged when it comes to access to higher education institutions in Jordan. This paper will include an overview of the landscape of higher education in Jordan in order to provide basic knowledge of the system. The purpose of this country analysis paper is to explore the risks, opportunities, and benefits of the higher education system in Jordan with regard to native Jordanians and refugee populations.

OVERVIEW OF JORDAN'S HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

The Jordanian education system has always been on par with that of other world powers, such as the United States or the UK. To this day, education is compulsory and free by the law for children ages 6-15. Jordan gained independence in 1964, and since then their education system has been wholly modeled after that of Great Britain. Jordan's higher education system didn't garner much attention from country leaders until the 1960's, when many of Jordan's most popular universities were established. At the time, these universities were governed by the Ministry of Education, until 1982 when the Ministry of Higher Education was formed. King Abdullah II took the throne in 1999, and in order to overcome enormous debt, increasing unemployment, and poverty, he decided to focus on education as a means of economic reform. In a brief by the Jordan Ministry of Education, the author states, "Moreover, the ministry worked on bridging the gap between higher education output and labor market in order to respond to the present and future needs of qualified and specialized cadres in various areas of knowledge; and to compensate for the lack of natural resources in the region by creating a qualified human resource fortified by knowl-

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