

Chapter 3


The Strategic Transformation Journey of AlMaarefa University: Navigating New Horizons

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ABSTRACT

In an era marked by rapid technological advancements and dynamic educational shifts, AlMaarefa University (UM) stands out as an innovative institution with strategic foresight. Since its founding in 2009, UM has consistently articulated and updated its strategic objectives. Recently, the university has unveiled a comprehensive transformation plan spanning from 2022 to 2026, as presented in this chapter. Aligned with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, this plan outlines UM's continuously forward-thinking evolution. It transitions from a strategic blueprint to a transformational mindset, solidifying UM's position as a leader in higher education. The chapter also highlights groundbreaking achievements two years into the plan, emphasizing UM's commitment to educational and research innovation. Additionally, it introduces a cutting-edge methodology for prioritizing strategic goals and executive projects, rooted in multi-criteria decision-making and project management principles.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a crucial role in advancing scientific research and providing comprehensive education in societies worldwide. However, the influence of political, economic, and cultural factors across diverse geographic regions creates significant disparities between HEIs, both globally and domestically. HEIs experienced a remarkable recovery following the Second World War until the late 1970s. This resurgence was primarily driven by a surge in demand for higher education. Several factors contributed to this trend, including the availability of lucrative job opportunities for university graduates, free education in certain countries, increased government scholarships for studying abroad, and a growing demand for university education. As a result, the number of universities worldwide experienced rapid growth, reaching 3,722 institutions in the United States alone by NCES (2023).

In HEIs, strategic planning is a vital process that systematically identifies the institution's long-term direction. It involves deliberate, disciplined efforts to shape and guide what the institution stands for, what it does, and why. The significance of strategic planning cannot be overstated—it provides a framework for HEIs to navigate educational complexities, adapt to evolving environments, and ensure sustainable success. This comprehensive approach includes establishing planning priorities, guiding the process, and achieving the plan's goals. Stages of the plan involve reviewing the organization's mission, vision, and values; identifying critical stakeholders; conducting environmental scans; setting measurable goals; and developing action plans. Strategic planning aligns resources with mission and priorities, anticipates changes, enhances institutional effectiveness, engages stakeholders, and drives innovation. By engaging in strategic planning, higher education institutions (HEIs) cultivate a collective sense of purpose and alignment among faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders. This collaborative approach not only informs decision-making but also nurtures a culture of responsibility and continuous improvement. Ultimately, strategic planning empowers HEIs to fulfill their educational, research, and community service commitments while positioning themselves for success in a dynamic and global educational landscape.

In Saudi Arabia, HEIs have witnessed significant changes over the years, since the establishment of the first University in Saudi Arabia in 1957. These include both government-funded (public) universities and more recently, nonprofit and private institutions. Public universities, colleges, and institutions fall under government governance, whilst private universities and colleges are run by individual investors and companies, albeit with Ministry of Higher Education (MOE) oversight. HEIs offer bachelor's, post-graduate certificates and higher diplomas, master's, and doctoral degrees. Saudi Arabia has also shifted from government control to a more diverse governance model. One of the distinct reputable HEIs in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, is AlMaarefa University (UM), established in 2009 due to a growing national need for reliable expanded medical and health education and increased labor force. As a private institution, UM has played a vital role in fulfilling this need. UM has presented enhanced teaching and learning methodologies and experiences through leveraging cutting-edge educational technologies and sustaining strong industrial partnerships. It attracts students from Riyadh, other regions of Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. UM is ranked among the top private universities in Saudi Arabia. The university fosters an inclusive and dynamic educational environment to meet the evolving needs of its diverse student population. Correspondingly, this chapter has the following three objectives:

1. Provide an overview of the University of AlMaarefa (UM).
2. Explain the methodology used to develop the Strategic Transformation Plan (STP) at UM.
3. Introduce a novel mathematical technique for ranking the strategic objectives of the STP.

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