A Thesis

entitled

Targeted Areas of School Improvement in Saudi Arabia

by

Hanadi A. Alyamani

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Education Degree in Educational Administration and Supervision

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An Abstract of

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Although the education system of Saudi Arabia has gone through several improvement efforts by the Ministry of Education and other agencies such as King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Public Education Development Project (Tatweer) and Public Education Evaluation Commission (PEEC), the need for further improvement is still calling. Initiating a vision for Saudi Arabia 2030 in 2016 has guided the work of Saudi citizens to fulfill the vision goals in all fields. The vision gave considerable focus to education, which guided the Ministry of Education to set eight strategic objectives and 36 initiatives for the National Transformation Program 2020. Accordingly, this paper targeted four areas of school improvement: professional development, student-centered learning model, developing students' core life skills, and school-family partnership. The strategy used to study the identified areas is comparing them to the same areas in the American education system, and then make recommendations for improvement based on the successful practices in the American system that align with the Saudi education system.

Keywords: School Improvement, Professional Development, Student-Centered Learning Model, Developing Students' Core Life Skills, School-Family Partnership
To my Father, Dr. Abdullah Alyamani, and my Mother, Dr. Lutfia Tujaralshahi. I cannot thank you enough for all the sacrifice you have made to see me soar to greater heights especially continuing my education. Without your love and support, I wouldn’t have been able to attain this level through the journey of my life. All I want now is to be that daughter who makes you as proud as you have always made me.
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Chapter One

Current Educational System in Saudi Arabia

Administration, Regulations, Goals, and Principles

In December 1969, the Educational Policy Document was issued by the Council of Ministries Resolution, No. 779 of 17. This document has been considered as the fundamental guide of educational principles, goals, and objectives in Saudi Arabia. It emphasizes the right Islamic orientation and provides for extensive scientific and technological developments, with the ultimate objective of promoting human dignity and prosperity (UNESCO, 2011). According to the Educational Policy Document (1995) the State is responsible for providing free education, within its capacity and at all levels of education without charging any tuition fees. Thus, the State is responsible for all aspects of education in Saudi Arabia, and all citizens and residents have the right to get free education at all school levels (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, & Technical and Vocational Training Corporation, 2008). The state is represented by the Ministry of Education, which is in charge of general education (elementary, intermediate and secondary), special education, adult education and literacy, higher education, and the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation. The latter oversees the combination of some institutes and training centers that were under the authority of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

Generally, the Supreme Committee for Educational Policy is the highest authority for education in Saudi Arabia (UNESCO, 2011). The responsibilities of the state include, but not limited to constructing school buildings, providing students' textbooks and other educational supplies, training teachers and paying their salaries and pensions, and
improving the quality of education. However, the private sector participates in providing education through private schools and institutions under the state supervision (Ministry of Education et al., 2008). The general goal of Education in Saudi Arabia as stated in UNESCO 7th edition of the World Data of Education (2011) is "to have students understand Islam in a correct and comprehensive manner; to plant and spread the Islam creed; to provide the students with the values, teachings, and ideals of Islam; to equip them with various skills and knowledge; to develop their conduct in constructive directions; to develop the society economically and culturally; and to prepare the individual to be a useful member in the building of his/her community"(p.1). Education in Saudi Arabia, like in every other country, has general principles applied statewide. These principles are derived from Islam, which is the religion, law, and life system of the state. According to Supreme Committee of Educational Policy (1995), the six essential principles of education in Saudi Arabia are:

1. Believing in Allah as our God, Islam as our religion, and Mohammed (peace be upon him) as our prophet.
2. Conceiving the universe, human being, and life from the perspective of Islam.
3. Reinforcing the responsibility of Muslim individuals to seek education and the responsibility of the state to provide education within its capacity and resources.
4. Giving females the exact right of males to receive education.
5. Connecting education plans with the state general development plans.
6. Using Arabic language in teaching and instruction.
Public Education Schools

Public education schools in Saudi Arabia consist of kindergarten, six years of primary school, three years of intermediate school, and three years of high school. According to the Ministry of Education's last Statistic for the academic year of 2014-2015, there were 2,920 kindergartens, 15,579 primary schools, 9,528 intermediate schools, and 6,790 high schools in 13 regions around Saudi Arabia. These schools had served 5,730,031 students from all stages and levels of education (Ministry of Education, 2015). Regardless of the great number of students attending public education schools and the large geographic area of Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Education still has the authority to issue the essential decisions, and observe the leadership of the schools. Accordingly, the school principals' authorities are limited. In fact, they work as managers of their schools instead of school leaders (Meemar, 2014).

Schools’ Organizational Structures

The schools’ organizational map is an effective method to explain the organizational structure of schools. It shows the type of work, the number of administrative levels, and the connections between them. These maps are designed to illustrate the work of school staff to achieve the schools' educational and academic goals. They vary based on schools' size and number of enrolled students (Figures 1 to 4) (Ministry of Education, 2016).
Figure 1: Organizational Structure Map of Public Education Schools Based on School Size (Three Vice Principals) *

* Not applicable to elementary schools
Figure 2: Organizational Structure Map of Public Education Schools Based on School Size (Two Vice Principals) *
* Not applicable to elementary schools
Figure 3: Organizational Structure Map of Public Education Schools Based on School Size (One Vice Principals) *

**Note:**
The second clause of Public Schools' Leaders Authorities states that School Council has the right to combine other councils and committees if needed, except School Council and the Committee of Guidance and Counseling, as long as their performance is not affected; and that is eligible for schools that have only 15 teachers or less.
* Not applicable to elementary schools
Figure 4: Organizational Structure Map of Public Education Schools Based on School Size (No Vice Principals)*

Note:
The second clause of Public Schools' Leaders Authorities states that School Council has the right to combine other councils and committees if needed, except School Council and the Committee of Guidance and Counseling, as long as their performance is not affected; and that is eligible for schools that have only 15 teachers or less* Not applicable for elementary schools

School Leadership Tasks, Expectations, and Authorities

As shown in the organizational structure maps, it can be noticed that leadership tasks are often divided between four members. First, the school leader (principal), whose job is leading the school academically and educationally to achieve its desired goals.

Second, the vice principal for educational affairs, whose job is contributing in school's
leadership and improving the quality of teaching and learning process. Third, the vice principal for school affairs, who is responsible for supervising the process of supplying the school with all administrative services that support educational procedures through providing the needed furniture, devices, and teaching supplies in addition to managing the maintenance and cleanliness of school facilities. Finally, the vice principal for student affairs, oversees planning and organizing students' affairs and addressing all issues related to them. All three vice principals report to the school leader while the school leader reports directly to the Education Directorate and the Central Office of Education which link schools with the Ministry of Education in each province of Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Education, 2016).

According to the third edition of the Organizational Guide for General Education Schools, the tasks of vice principals might be combined depending on the size of the school and the number of students attending it. In most cases, this indicates that it is possible for the school leader to become the only responsible member for all leadership tasks. These tasks include, but not limited to:

1. Facilitating the process of writing the school general plan.
2. Informing school staff of their responsibilities and job descriptions in accordance to the Organizational and Procedural Guide, in the beginning of the school year.
3. Overseeing and preparing class schedules, and ensuring fairness and equality among all staff members with respect to the work load.
4. Leading the process of teaching and learning in the school.
5. Reinforcing the values of affiliation, citizenship, and maintaining the safety of the kingdom.
6. Supporting programs and activities that strengthen the concepts of Islamic pride, loyalty to the king, and affiliation to the country.

7. Monitoring and reporting school's operational expenses to the Education Directorate and the Central Office of Education.

8. Monitoring school facilities' preparation and organization, and writing the needed reports about it.

9. Determining school needs and reporting them to the Educational and Administrative Body.

10. Identifying differentiations between staff members in order to exclude extra staff, if any.

11. Creating and activating school committees, councils, and work teams, and monitoring their work according to the principal's approved authorities.

12. Observing the performance of the Educational and Administrative Body through visiting their classrooms and observing their work and activities.

13. Monitoring teachers' commitment to following the weekly and monthly curriculum timeline schedule.

14. Supporting and supervising new teachers and providing them with the needed orientation.

15. Participating in building school staff's abilities and capacities through determining and planning the appropriate training programs for them in order to implant the idea of professional learning communities.

16. Assigning the tasks of vice principals for two consecutive years - in the case of schools with more than one vice principal, tasks are switched between the two
after every two years to enable progress in their level of efficiency and experience.

17. Empowering vice principals to take active roles in school leadership based on approved instructions such as building their internal efficiency.

18. Identifying differentiations between vice principals in order to choose one of them to supervise the programs of Special Education (Educational Affairs) –based on the approved regulations and standards of School Leadership Committee- considering that they are not allowed to fill the position for more than two years.

19. Assigning administrative assistants – if more than five – to participate in school morning and afternoon shifts with teachers.

20. In small schools that do not have vice principals, the school principal is responsible for issuing an internal commission that ensures reducing the class load of one of the teachers to enable that teacher do the tasks of the vice principal.

21. Coordinating the visits of superintendents and other official visitors.

22. Explaining the system and its regulations to school board and staff members, and discussing them to illustrate the details and implementation plan.

23. Monitoring the work of evaluation and examination, and ensuring its fidelity according to the confirmed systems and regulations.

24. Supervising the process of analyzing tests results and student performance evaluation, and making an action plan to increase academic achievement.

25. Submitting proposals that help in improving school work, to the Education Directorate and the Central Office of Education
26. Strengthening the social role of the school through providing voluntary work opportunities, based on the approved instructions, and meeting with parents and other community members who can contribute to achieving school goals.

27. Preparing reports of staff members' performance evaluation, according to the approved instructions.

28. Monitoring writing of the yearly school report of activities and accomplishments, and submitting it to the Education Directorate.

29. Participating in training programs and meetings as determined by competent parties.

30. Studying and revising agreements that support school work and goals, with licensed governmental and private entities before approving them.

31. Arranging the school operational budget, monitoring payments procedures, ensuring their documentation based on approved instructions, writing reports, and submitting them to the Education Directorate and the Central Office of Education.

32. Monitoring school cafeteria and ensuring its qualification to operate based on organizational standards and the health condition of the food provided.

33. Supervising students' morning lineup program, and guiding daily work to ensure alignment and professionalism.

34. Following up with dismissing students' rewards and subventions.

35. Working on improving school work's procedures and methods constantly, and developing staff members' performance.

36. Ensuring school folders and records readiness and professionalism.

37. Resolving incidental interior deficiency following the approved instructions.
38. Managing school building's hygiene and maintenance.

39. Supervising summer semester plan. *

40. Monitoring plan implementation fidelity. *

41. Monitoring the procedures and instructions of academic advising, and approving teachers who will be academic advisors. *

42. Monitoring the process of adding and dropping classes. *

43. Teaching assigned classes in elementary school.

44. Overseeing any other tasks in their area of specialty, as required by the direct supervisor.

*Only for principals of schools that adapt Hour Courses System (Ministry of Education, 2016)

Despite the wide range of tasks assigned to the leadership team inside the school, the Ministry of Education still "is responsible for all educational decisions including policies, planning, program implementation, and professional development……. This top-down centralization has the effect of limiting the school leader's responsibilities and authority" (Khalil & Karim, 2016, p. 505). Algarni and Male (2014) added that this centralized system diminishes school independence and eliminates creativity among school leaders. This also could affect school climate negatively if adapting the same centralized system inside the school instead of distributing leadership and strengthening teamwork and creativity. However, the Ministry of Education is trying to reform the educational centralized system by giving school leaders more authorities. In January 2016, the minister of education approved the decision of giving school leaders 60 authorities which adds nine new authorities to the old version that was approved in 2011.
The 60 authorities cover a wide range of school operations such as approving school councils and committees and managing all their procedures; reducing the number of classrooms, or adding if needed; making any modifications to the length of the school day if needed; and approving school activities and visits. Additionally, moving between the clauses of the school operational budget once a year; training, evaluating, rewarding, and taking the needed action with delinquent staff members; representing the school in different national committees; contacting government agencies and administrator of education directly; and approving students' admission and managing all their cases.

Other operational services include contracting with competent agencies to manage school cafeteria, maintenance, cleanliness; and naming school facilities after remarkable staff members, businessmen who fund some school facilities, or soldiers’ fathers who passed away in the war defending our country (Ministry of Education, 2016). The document of School Leaders Authorities issued by the Ministry of Education contains a detailed description of each authority and its implementation procedures. The purpose of expanding school leaders' authorities is to give schools more independence in facing their challenges and enable principals to make decisions in the cases related to their schools without going through any bureaucratic process (Ministry of Education, 2016).

**Education Reform**

Over the past decade, many education reform initiatives were launched in Saudi Arabia for facing education challenges and improving the quality of education. The most important reform initiatives are King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Public Education Development Project, "Tatweer", an Arabic word for development, in 2007 and Public Education Evaluation Commission (PEEC) in 2013.
King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Public Education Development Project (Tatweer). Tatweer is one of the most significant reform initiatives launched by King Abdullah Al-Saud in 2007 with the goal of transforming the educational system of Saudi Arabia into a more modern system of education (Meemar, 2014). The project is intended to benefit from the international experiences, in addition to the national experience, through visiting international educational institutions and learning from their successful global practices. Thus, the Ministry of Education arranged several visits by its representative committees to the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Austria, Switzerland, Canada, France, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore, Korea, China, and Japan (Al-Awsat, 2007).

Tatweer aims to be an effective contribution to increasing the competitiveness of Saudi Arabia and to building knowledge community through building an integral system of educational, evaluation, and accounting standards, and through launching five major programs for education development: (1) continuous professional development for all employees, (2) improvement of curricula and learning materials, (3) improvement of educational environment to enhance learning, (4) utilizing information technology to improve learning, and (5) designing extra-curricular activities and students services (Tatweer, 2016.). The philosophy of the project was to “focus on school development, and this was because of the importance of school as a unit of the educational system, where efforts of reform and improvement of the education system can be made” (Alyami, 2014, p. 1515). Tatweer plan added that the main goal of improving education in Saudi Arabia to increase student academic achievement through developing, supporting and empowering schools by all the levels the educational system (Tatweer, 2016).
To build the ability of making change in the level of schools and the Education Directorates, the Tatweer plan identifies nine enablers that facilitate the implementation of its vision for a new system of education. These enablers are: (1) empowering education directorates and schools to lead change toward the new model of school, (2) improving curricula, instruction, and assessment to support student achievement, (3) providing equal support and learning opportunities for all students, (4) providing early childhood education for all, (5) providing modern educational environment that motivates student learning; (6) promoting students' health, prosperity, discipline, and character, (7) engaging families and community members to support student learning, (8) developing an integral system to professionalize teaching instructions, and (9) developing the governance of education leadership, rewards, and policies to ensure sustainability of the new school model (Meemar, 2014). Additionally, the Tatweer project is implemented in selected schools that meet specific standards related to the school building and facilities, the school locations, and the performance of school leadership and team members. Currently, 900 schools around the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are included in the implementation of Tatweer project. In the next stage, all schools of the Saudi public education will be included in Tatweer (Meemar, 2014).

Public Education Evaluation Commission (PEEC). Believing in the importance of the evaluation process in improving the public education system, the Public Education Evaluation Commission (PEEC) was founded in 2013, in accordance with a resolution of the Council of Ministers. According to PEEC website (2014), the resolution instructs that "the Commission be a public organization with an independent corporate personality and that it will be responsible for the evaluation of private and
The commission reports directly to the Prime Minister, and is led by the Governor of the Commission. PEEC aims to make a major spring in the education system of Saudi Arabia based on technical and systematic principles derived from most successful global practices that is consistent with the general vision and policy of the kingdom and the status of Saudi education.

PEEC has set 14 objectives for its evaluation process based on responsibility allotted by the Council of Ministers:

1. To ensure the quality of public education by constructing a system of evaluation
2. Constructing a national framework of qualification
3. Establishing advanced standards for measuring performance effectiveness at all stages of public education
4. Establishing standards for public education curricula
5. Periodically certifying and assessing the performance of both public and private schools
6. To construct and implement standardized nationwide tests for each stage
7. Ensuring quality education by setting regulations and issuing suitable guidelines
8. General education workers would be guided by set professional standards and undergo standard proficiency tests
9. Establishing a teacher licensing requirements system
10. Assessing private and public schools’ programs
11. Carrying out and supporting research studies in evaluation field
12. Publicizing the outcome of evaluation and accreditation
13. To issue, in its field of specialty, books, brochures, handbooks, periodicals, and scientific journals


In addition, PEEC provided 10 main services to facilitate the evaluation process:

1. To ensure that educational results are effectively linked with job markets and that the diverse learner’s qualifications are unified, by developing a nation-wide framework

2. Developing the system of public education quality including setting standards and indicators for evaluating the quality of education

3. Developing the system of professional licensing for those who work at schools. This entails the issuance and supervision of periodical license renewal to achieve high performance among school workers

4. Review and accreditation of educational programs applied in schools

5. Accrediting schools according to PEEC standards. It aids school improvements in response to PEEC research results

6. Assessing and improving student learning content through development of public education curriculum criteria

7. Assessing educational organizations for example education directories

8. Ensuring the efficiency of educational programs provided by the Ministry of Education, by evaluating the programs

9. Assessing various aspects of school performance such as teacher performance and student achievement
10. Gathering evidence from diverse sources to evaluate the efficiency level of the public education system
Chapter Two

Recent Transformation in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030

In April 2016, Saudi Arabia was set to enter a new transformation phase after the announcement of Vision 2030 by Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is the chair of the Council of Economic Development Authority (CEDA) and Minister of Defense. He indicates that the vision is looking forward to "a strong, thriving, and stable Saudi Arabia that provides opportunity for all. Our vision is a tolerant country with Islam as its constitution and moderation as its method" (Al-Saud, 2016, p.6). It was clearly stated in the Vision foreword that it is determined "to build a thriving country in which all citizens can fulfill their dreams, hopes and ambitions. Therefore, we will not rest until our nation is a leader in providing opportunities for all through education and training, and high quality services" (Al-Saud, 2016, p.6). It is widely believed that "all success stories start with a vision, and successful visions are based on strong pillars" (Al-Saud, 2016, p.5). Therefore, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 was mainly based on the strong pillars already in place. Prince Mohammed bin Salman summarized the substantial strong pillars of Saudi Arabia in three points. First, the significant status of Saudi Arabia as the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds. Second, the leading investment capabilities of Saudi Arabia. Third, Saudi Arabia's strategic geographical position. Accordingly, the vision was built around three main themes; a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation. Each theme includes subthemes. Education is mentioned in the first theme; a vibrant society, and in the second theme; a thriving economy.
**Vibrant Society.** The vision seeks to build a vibrant society with strong foundations. The goal is "to promote and reinvigorate social development in order to build a strong and productive society" (Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, 2016, p. 28). This goal will be reached as the Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 (2016) stated; "strengthen our families, provide the education that builds our children’s fundamental characters and establish empowering health and social care systems" (Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, 2016, p.28-29). The first subtheme, building our children's characters, speaks of the intention to reshape the academic and educational system in order to implant positive moral beliefs in children’s characters from an early age. The fundamental values of initiative, persistence and leadership, cultural knowledge, and self-awareness as well as social skills will be the main focus. It also stated that involving families to work with the school will strengthen the foundations of the community by providing students with the skills, knowledge, and behaviors essential for strong and independent characters to arise. Additionally, educational, cultural, and entertainment institutions will be empowered to promote cultural, social, volunteering, and athletic activities for children.

Among the vision's commitments of this theme, a vibrant society with strong foundation, is IRTIQAA, an Arabic word for progress. It is a program that aims to reinforce the engagement of families in their children's learning experience by providing more school activities. The objective of this program is to engage 80% of the families in school activities by 2020. The program will measure how effectively schools are engaging parents in school activities by initiating boards that are led by parents in schools, where they can provide their input and discuss issues related to their children's education. Training programs for teachers will be provided to increase their awareness of
the importance of parents' engagement, and to prepare them to communicate with parents effectively. The program will also seek to collaborate with private and non-profit sectors to create more programs and events in order to strengthen school-family partnership.

**Thriving Economy.** Improving education also shows up in the second theme of the vision, a thriving economy, specifically in the part of thriving economy with rewarding opportunities. This theme is designed out of the belief that "the skills and competencies of our children are one of the most important and cherished assets" (Saudi Arabia's vision 2030, 2016, p. 36). It aims to "build a culture that rewards determination, provides opportunities for all and helps everyone acquire the necessary skills to achieve their personal goals" (Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, 2016, p. 36-37). In order to achieve that goal, the vision states a commitment to reinforce the ability of economy to provide diverse job opportunities, and attract international talents and competences to work with Saudi Arabia and support its economy.

**Learning for Working.** This is the first subtheme of the thriving economy theme. It emphasizes the importance of investing in education and training to provide youth with the necessary skills and knowledge that prepare them for future jobs. The goal of this subtheme is for the Saudi children to enjoy higher quality and multi-faceted education wherever they live. “We will invest particularly in developing early childhood education, refining our national curriculum, and training our teachers and educational leaders” (Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, 2016, p. 36). This subtheme also seeks to illuminate the gap between the outcomes of the educational system and the demands of the job market through different methods. First, establishing the National Labor Gateway that is called TAQAT, an Arabic word for energies, and planning to establish sector councils for each
socio-economic sector in order to specify the talents and skills they need. Vocational training will be expanding in order to increase the development of the economy. Scholarship opportunities will be focused on fields that support the national priorities in high-status international universities. Finally, the imperative will be on modernization of advanced technologies and entrepreneurship (Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, 2016).

One of the vision commitments in this theme is Education That Contributes to Economic Growth. The objective is "in the year 2030, we aim to have at least five Saudi universities among the top 200 universities in international rankings. We shall help our students achieve results above international averages in global education indicators" (Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, 2016, p. 40). This objective will be reached by preparing effective curricula that focus on the rigorous standards in literacy and numeracy skills in addition to character development. In addition, it will (1) monitor progress and publish the yearly education system's outcomes reports, (2) work with experts to ensure higher education outcomes are in line with the requirements of the job market by partnership with private and international sectors that provide training for graduates, (3) develop job qualifications of each education field, and (4) establish comprehensive database to track students from early childhood through to K-12 and beyond into higher and vocational education in order to monitor, evaluate, and improve education outcomes (Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, 2016).

**Achieving the vision.** The vision document stated that many transformative programs were launched for the purpose of reaching Saudi Arabia's ambitions and expectations. These programs are the first step that will guide the work toward achieving the goals of the vision. Additionally, in order to guarantee the comprehensions
of Saudi Arabia’s Vision for 2030, a number of executive programs that will impact the implementation of the vision strategic objectives were launched (Saudi Arabia's Vision, 2030, 2016). This paper will talk about one of these executive programs which is called the National Transformational Program. The purpose of choosing this program is because the Ministry of Education is one of its participating entities that prepared a plan for implementing the Saudi Arabia's vision 2030.

National Transformation Program (NTP)

Transformation is required to build the institutional capacity and competences necessary to achieve the determined goals of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030. Accordingly, through many workshops, government agencies aimed at identifying national priorities and suggesting essential delivery initiatives such as private sector partnerships (Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, 2016). "National Transformation Program (NTP) was developed to help fulfill Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, and to identify the challenges faced by government bodies in the economic and development sectors" (NTP, 2016, p. 10). Initiatives relevant to realizing goals are identified each year by the program. It also develops comprehensive plans for performance measurement and monitoring. The NTP identified the supportive strategic objectives as well as potential hindrances to goal realization, and created innovative targets in order to accomplish Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030. Several effective common national priorities and their public benefits were also identified analyzed within specialized support units (NTP, 2016).
**Ministry of Education.** Transformation Program went through the process of planning for transformation and reforming. After tremendous workshops and discussions by hundreds of national experts in education, the Ministry of Education was able to identify six challenges facing their work, set eight strategic objectives for 2020 that are aligned with the Vision 2030 objectives, determine Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for each strategic objective, and then establish 36 initiatives for 2020 (Al-Awsat, 2016).

According to NTP (2016) "the eight strategic objectives of the Ministry of Education are:

1. Providing education services for all student levels.
2. Improving recruitment, training and development of teachers.
3. Improving the learning environment to stimulate creativity and innovation.
4. Improving curricula and teaching methods.
5. Improving students’ values and core skills.
6. Enhancing the educational system's capability to address development requirements and labor market demands.
7. Developing creative financing methods and improving the educational system's financial efficiency.
8. Increasing Private Sector Participation in the Education Sector" (NTP, 2016, p. 60).

These strategic objectives will be discussed and explained in details in the next chapter.
Chapter Three

National Transformation and Ministry of Education

In order to achieve the objectives of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, each participating entity in the National Transformation Program (NTP) including the Ministry of Education went through five phases of operating model.

Phase One: Identifying Challenges and Establishing 2020 Interim Targets

In this phase, each entity identifies the most significant challenges it faces in fulfilling vision 2030. After that, they set short-term targets to address these challenges that may arise in the period from 2016 to 2020, which is the length of the NTP. These targets were determined by comparing the current situation with regional and international benchmarks. Thus, the Ministry of Education has identified six challenges it faces towards achieving vision 2030, and then set eight strategic objectives for 2020, with specified Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and interim targets (NTP, 2016). The following table shows the eight strategic objectives of the Ministry of Education, their KPI and targets based on regional benchmarks (RB) and international benchmarks (IB).

Table 1: NTP Strategic Objectives of the Ministry of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Objective (1)</th>
<th>Providing education services for all student levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KPI</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of children enrolled in kindergarten (3 to 6 years)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of illiterate adults (15 years and older-Saudis)</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students utilizing school transportation services (in public schools)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students with disabilities utilizing the students' disability support program (6-18 years)</td>
<td>$\frac{58,600}{\text{number of Saudi kids 6-18}}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strategic Objective (2)**

**Improving recruitment, training and development of teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KPI</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>2020 Target</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>RB</th>
<th>IB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average number of professional development hours completed by teachers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Number of hours</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of hours of professional development in educational leadership completed by school leaders</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Number of hours</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of teachers passed (Qiyas) test *</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strategic Objective (3)**

**Improving the learning environment to stimulate creativity and innovation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KPI</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>2020 Target</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>RB</th>
<th>IB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of medals and honors achieved in international competitions</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Under Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students benefiting from special gifted programs</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
<td>Under Study</td>
<td>6-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Strategic Objective (4)
**Improving curricula and teaching methods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KPI</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>2020 Target</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>RB</th>
<th>IB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average student results in international TIMSS tests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(eighth grade: Math and Science)</td>
<td>394 (Math), 426</td>
<td>450 (Math), 480</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>452,</td>
<td>611,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Science)</td>
<td>(Science)</td>
<td></td>
<td>483</td>
<td>590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average student results in international TIMSS tests</td>
<td>410 (Math), 429</td>
<td>460 (Math), 470</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>469,</td>
<td>606,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(fourth grade: Math and Science)</td>
<td>(Science)</td>
<td>(Science)</td>
<td></td>
<td>463</td>
<td>583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average student results in international reading tests</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(PISA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average student results in international reading tests</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(fourth grade- PIRLS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Strategic Objective (5)
**Improving students’ values and core skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KPI</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>2020 Target</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>RB</th>
<th>IB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students involved in extra-curricular</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities outside the school program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students utilizing the Community Clubs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
<td>Under Study</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Strategic Objective (6)
Enhancing the educational system's capability to address development requirements and labor market demands.
### Strategic Objective (7)

**Developing creative financing methods and improving the educational system's financial efficiency.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KPI</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>2020 Target</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>RB</th>
<th>IB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of graduates who secured employment within 6 months of graduation</td>
<td>Under Study</td>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
<td>Under Study</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Strategic Objective (8)

**Increasing Private Sector Participation in the Education Sector**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KPI</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>2020 Target</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>RB</th>
<th>IB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students to teacher ratio</td>
<td>1:09</td>
<td>1:17</td>
<td>Ratio</td>
<td>1:15</td>
<td>1:25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Qiyas is an Arabic word that means "Measurement", and it is the name of a national standardized test for teachers which is called Vocational Standards Test for Teachers.*

**Phase Two: Developing Initiatives**

After determining its strategic objectives and targets, the Ministry of Education was able to develop 36 initiatives for the purpose of reaching these strategic objectives. The journey of designing these initiatives went through many discussions with local and international experts and private sector representatives, as well as studies of the global
According to NTP (2016) the initiatives of the Ministry of Education are:

1. The comprehensive framework for continuing professional development for teachers and educational leaders.
2. Shifting to digital education to support student and teacher progress.
3. Community clubs' entertainment and educational programs.
4. Improving the safety and security in school buildings.
5. Reducing the administrative burdens of teachers and education leaders to ensure that they focus on the educational process and to improve the quality of support services.
6. Encourage private sector to invest in public education in Saudi Arabia (including kindergarten).
7. Establish a Transformation Office at the Ministry of Education's new operating model.
8. Apply the Ministry of Education's new operating model.
9. Develop a national strategy to upgrade the teaching profession by raising the professional level of teachers, improving the profession's ecosystem, and raising the quality of services provided to teachers.
10. Improve the quality of primary education.
11. Development of nurseries and kindergarten programs and the expansion of their services to cover all Saudi Arabia's regions.
12. Improve international study scholarship program and improve its efficiency.
13. Develop core life and employability skills and integrate it with curricula and extra-curricular activities.
14. Establish King Salman University for Technical and Vocational Education.
15. Develop student-centric education model.
16. Enhancing participation in international scientific competitions.
17. Establishing technical labs in schools to foster students' vocational skills.
18. Attract private investments to finance schools' constructions.
19. Enhance planning and budgeting efficiency in order to achieve the rationalization of capital and operating expenses.
20. Center for English Language Education Development.
21. Center for Arabic Language Education Development.
22. Center for Development of Healthcare Information system.
23. Center for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education Development.
24. Project to develop special education and establish a national center dedicated to Special Education in collaboration with the private sector.
25. Establish the e-service framework for universities (Jame3a).
26. Establish a practical framework to align university graduates with labor market needs.
27. Develop curriculum assessment system.
29. Life-long Learning (sustainability).

30. Developing an awareness program on investment and entrepreneurship for high schools and university students.

31. Enhance the image of education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

32. Foster the role of the family in the educational process and promote national identity (IRTIQA Program).

33. Develop Digitization and GIS information system.


35. Establish an Office of Strategy Management at the ministry level.

36. Develop Key Performance Indicators at the ministry level (NTP, 2016, p. 100-102).

**Phase Three: Developing Implementation Plans.**

To ensure the fidelity of government spending, the Ministry of Education and all other entities developed a detailed plan for every initiative. The plan includes a detailed description of the stages and steps of implementation, the time line for each step, assigning responsibilities, and a list of the needed legislative, financial, and human resources (NTP, 2016).

**Phase Four: Promoting Transparency in the Publication of Targets and Outcomes**

In this phase, the targets and outcomes of each entity, including the Ministry of Education, will be published to enhance the transparency of the program. A constantly updated public performance indicator dashboard will be used in order to enable government agencies and other related parties to monitor and evaluate entities' performance (NTP, 2016).
Phase Five: Auditing, Continually Improving, Launching New Initiatives, and Adding New Participating Entities

In this phase, the level of reaching the strategic objectives will be continuously audited through intensive monitoring of the targets and the progress of implementing the initiatives. The audits will be conducted on two levels. First, audits for the level of achievement of targets related to the strategic objectives of the Ministry of Education, which represent the ministry's success in facing its challenges. Second, monitoring the progress of initiatives based on their detailed implementation plans, which allows making corrections early, to avoid problems that could affect the achievement of targets (NTP, 2016). This phase plays substantial part in providing feedback during implementation. Additionally, it helps the Ministry of Education and other entities to frequently modify their strategic objectives and targets and create new initiatives yearly. It also helps the administration of NTP to add additional government bodies to the program, by coordinating with the Strategic Management Office. Thus, reaching the desired 2020 targets of NTP will be attainable in accordance with the other four phases of the program’s operating model (NTP, 2016).

Targeted Areas of Improvement

After the previous review of the eight strategic objectives and 36 initiatives determined by the Ministry of Education for 2020, this paper will discuss four areas of improvement in the school level that are connected directly to the job of the school leader and the three vice principals, and fit in the authorities given to school leaders in Saudi Arabia. These four areas are:

1. Professional development.
2. Student-centered learning model.
3. Developing students' core life skills.
4. School-family partnership.

The paper will explain the current situation of the four areas in Saudi Arabia, display their current situation in the United States, and then compare the two situations. The comparison will suggest some successful practices and models for schools in Saudi Arabia that are applicable to the Saudi education system. Also, will suggest to facilitate achieving the strategic objectives of the Ministry of Education for the National Transformation Program and the Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

**Area One: Professional Development**

In Saudi Arabia, there are two systems of teacher preparation. Integrative System where students attend four-year undergraduate programs that provide educational and specialized courses, and Sequential System where students, after their graduation, attend two-year programs that are called Educational Diploma Programs (Binhwaimel & Alanadi, 2015). The study of Binhwaimel and Alanadi (2015) showed that the outcomes of teacher preparation programs in Saudi Arabia are very low due to their weak admission criteria. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education provided different efforts for teachers and educational leaders to develop their skills. According to Algarni and Male (2014), teacher training programs are often executed by the Education Directorate and the Central Office of Education and both provide workshops and lectures that increase teachers' knowledge and efficiency.

The school organizational structure designed by the Ministry of Education includes Teacher Council and Committee of Excellence and Quality. These two
authorities provide teacher support in the school level. The main goal of the Teacher Council is enhancing teachers' social and professional relationships, and studying the challenges they face in the school and take the necessary actions toward them for the purpose of improving teaching and learning process. The main goal of the Committee of Excellence and Quality is improving the quality of the teaching and learning process and the organizational process to improve the overall efficiency of the school performance.

The committee duties include, but not limited to, supporting teachers professionally and educationally; preparing training programs to support new teachers; contributing to build teachers skills and capabilities and insuring their quality; and activating learning communities by providing programs, workshops, and visits to improve teachers’ knowledge and skills (Ministry of Education, 2016).

Additionally, the Tatweer project contributes to the improvement of teachers and school leaders by providing several training and professional development programs. For instance, one of the programs provided by Tatweer is the Teachers Training Program, which aims to provide teachers with the basic skills of their profession. Another program by Tatweer is the School Leaders Training program. The program aims to prepare current and future leaders by developing their leadership skills, and improving their performance and the performance of teachers. Moreover, the National Professional Standards for Teachers program is also provided by Tatweer. This program aims at determining the areas that are needed for teacher improvement, by measuring the knowledge and teaching skills of new teachers. Feedback from these resources can then be reported to organizations that provide teacher training. The information also helps to create evaluation criteria for teachers based on the national standardized test. Results from the
national standardized test are used to design professional development programs for teachers.

In 2014, Tatweer launched a program called the Teacher Professional Development Project, to support new teachers. This project aims to prepare new teachers to work in public education schools by helping them understand their responsibilities, and develop their knowledge and skills of teaching pedagogy, lesson planning, class management, assessment, and providing feedback to students. It also enhances their self-confidence in their ability to evaluate their practices to improve their performance.

The newest program for teacher and school leader training was launched in 2016 in accordance with the Saudi Arabia's vision 2030. This program was designed to help improve the Saudi system of education based on international standards and requirements through international partnerships. The idea of this program is to send Saudi teachers, school leaders, student advisors, and superintendents to be trained for three to four months in countries that are advanced in the field of education such as the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, Finland, Singapore, New Zealand, Ireland, and Sweden. The program came out of the concept of the living experience, which allows participants to practice what they learn in a school setting, where colleagues can advise and mentor them through their training experience to help improve their practices and performance (Tatweer, 2016).

**Area Two: Student-Centered Learning Model.**

According to Overby (2011), "the concept of student-centered learning is to bring the classroom and students to life. The teacher is considered a “guide on the side”, assisting and guiding students to meet the goals that have been made by the students and
the teacher" (p. 1). In order to effectively activate the model, teachers need to be trained and enabled to teach in "student-centered way", and to design "individual learning programs" for each student (Almalki & Williams, 2012). However, teachers' roles in Saudi education system have significantly shifted in recent years. They have become more aware of their students' interests, skills, and goals, which transformed them from traditional "knowledge transmitters" in teacher-centered setting to "facilitators of learning" in student-centered setting (Alturki, 2007).

In the most recent meeting between the Minister of Education of Saudi Arabia, Dr. Ahmed Al-Issa, and UNESCO Director General, Irina Bokova, Dr. Al-Issa asserted that Saudi Arabia is planning for a huge reform in its education system which would include the role of teachers and teaching methods. He also mentioned that teacher training is one of the biggest challenges, with the need to encourage more student-centered approaches and focus on 21st Century skills (UNESCO, 2016). Examples of student-centered approaches already implemented in some schools of public education in Saudi Arabia are project-based learning, cooperative learning, and E-learning.

**Area Three: Developing Students' Core Life Skills**

According to Alzunaidi (2013) core life skills can be developed through curriculum, in two approaches. Firstly, direct approach which depends on introducing and developing core life skills as an independent subject and curriculum. Secondly, indirect approach which integrates core life skills in regular curriculum, to support the theoretical information students learn in that curriculum. The Ministry of Education used the direct approach in designing a curriculum for core life skills and family education. This curriculum was designed for high schools that adopt credit hour system. The
curriculum consists of several skills related to communicating with others in students' families and community which enable students to increase their efficiency in communication. These skills include personal and social skills, strengthening family stability, and activating roles and responsibilities skills, thinking skills, time investment skills, and the development of community awareness and national loyalty (Ministry of Education, 2015).

On the other hand, Alzunaidi (2013) studied the efficiency of the indirect approach in the Saudi curriculum. She examined the role of Science curriculum in developing core life skills of 7th grade students in Saudi Arabia. The study included 118 female students who were tested before and after finishing the curriculum. Findings of the study stated that the percentage of core life skills integrated in 7th grade Science curriculum is 68%, which is considered an average percentage within Science curriculum. The study also showed that the percentage of the integrated personal skills is 83.09%, percentage of social skills is 14.33%, percentage of environmental skills is 1.61%, and percentage of preventive skills is 0.81%. Finally, when the female students were given a post test, only 31.46% demonstrated mastery at the 80% level. Thus, 68.54% did not achieve mastery.

Additionally, the Ministry of Education gave significant attention to the role of extra-curricular activities in developing students' core life skills. In 2014, Tatweer issued a guide of extra-curricular activities for Tatweer schools that explains their conceptual framework and administrative and regulatory framework. Extra-curricular activities are defined as a group of attractive educational programs that are designed by schools, in accordance with the school plan, for all students in a motivating environment that
enhances teaching and learning processes. Students choose to participate in the clubs based on their interests and needs for growing and expanding their personal experiences in a way that aligns with the school academic program. The guide shows that the activity clubs are gathered in three categories based on the needs of learners, school environment, and family and local community. Firstly, the clubs that are designed to fulfill learners' needs are sports clubs (such as soccer, volleyball, and athletics), morning broadcast club, scientific innovations clubs (robot team and nano team), and foreign languages clubs (French language training and English speaking competition). Secondly, the clubs that are designed to fulfill school environment's needs are health awareness club, school organization club, and environment club. Finally, the clubs that are designed to meet family and local community's needs are volunteering services club, blood donation club, and crafts and vocational work club (Tatweer, 2014).

Another form of extra-curricular activities established by the Ministry of Education is Neighborhood Schools' Clubs. These clubs are located in some school buildings in each neighborhood, and they are prepared with the needed facilities and equipment to provide educational and recreational activities. The clubs are meant for students of public education and all community members including kindergarten children and people with special needs. The activities of Neighborhood Schools' Clubs start after school, and are available four hours daily for four days a week. The program's mission is to contribute to the development of community interaction through encouraging community members, especially students, to spend their leisure time in an attractive and safe environment that builds personalities, develops skills, and strengthens positive values. The activities provided are in different fields such as human development, health
and physical activities, environment and science, and culture and society (Tatweer, 2016).

**Area Four: School-Family Partnership**

Saudi Arabia has been taking serious steps to improve school-family partnership in the recent years. In 2014, the Ministry of Education issued a resolution that ensures the importance of family, community, and schools’ partnerships in improving the quality of teaching and learning procedures. Hence, improving students' performance and academic achievement.

In the school level, the school organizational structure designed by the Ministry of Education includes the School Council and the Committee of Family and Community Partnership. The main goal of the School Council is enhancing and supporting school-community relationship in accordance with the school mission and improvement plan that aims to increase the quality of teaching and learning process. Furthermore, it motivates creativity and excellence in the performance of the school. The members of the School Council must include three parents and members to meet twice every semester. The main goal of the Committee of Family and Community Partnership is motivating and supporting the voluntary work and the social responsibility of school staff and participating in enhancing the integration and collaboration with the community. This committee's members must include three parents as well, and its duties include, but not limited to studying the needs of families and local community to work on meeting them, and training teachers, students, and parents for voluntary work (Ministry of Education, 2016).
Moreover, Tatweer included family and community partnership in its vision as a significant factor of improving schools' performance in Saudi Arabia. In the school guide of family and community partnership, Tatweer (2014) defined it as the efforts that the school and its staff spend for integrating and collaborating with families and local community to improve the effectiveness of implementing the school mission through the programs and activities included in its plan to improve the quality of education toward preparing good citizens who are pride on their religion, community, and country. The guide outlined the role of family in this partnership as well as the expectations from school, family, and students. The guide also described the impact of family and school partnership as the following: (1) unifying school and family's strategies of students' education, (2) integrating the efforts of assisting students and fulfilling their needs, (3) mutually supporting students to increase their academic achievement, (4) increasing parents' knowledge of the needs of their children based on their age, and the best methods to support them, and (5) preventing students from deviation and behavioral problems. Family and school partnership took many forms in the Tatweer guide such as parents' meetings, school reports and bulletins, E-mails, school website, and social media websites, school activities and events, and parents perception questionnaires (Tatweer, 2014).

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 also emphasized the important role of family and school partnership in the theme of Vibrant Society. The vision mentioned IRTIQAA, which is a program that aims to enhance the involvement of families in their children's learning. The objective of this program is to engage 80% of the families in school activities by 2020 (Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, 2016). Additionally, the Ministry of
Education in collaboration with Tatweer launched the first Annual Forum of School, Family and Community Partnership in March, 2016 with the attendance of 500 participants from various governmental and private agencies. The forum aims to strengthen educational leadership for the implementation of the school, family, and community partnership. It also enables the family to provide an appropriate educational environment with the involvement of community organizations concerned with education. The forum discussed, for more than two days, the theoretical and conceptual framework of the school, family and community partnership. In addition, it discussed important topics regarding the family, the academic and emotional learning, and the role of the partnership in achieving the overall security of the child (Ministry of Education, 2016).

A significant number of senior officials and consultants from within and outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia participated in the forum to share their researches, studies, and experiences in the field of education. In his speech, the Minister of Education, Dr. Ahmed Al-Issa, asserted that schools cannot operate in isolation from the family, which is the first incubator of the child and the nucleus of community. He further stated that it is imperative to achieve integration, and approach the gap between school and family, so as to support all efforts to develop and improve education according to a vision where roles and institutions are clear. He also stressed the importance of considering the major role of school in building children's personality and their acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to be good citizens who contribute to building their community. Dr. Al-Issa emphasized the importance of the integration of roles between family and school...
through a partnership built on scientific, organized and sustainable basis (Ministry of Education, 2016).
Chapter Four

A Comparison with the American Education System

Undoubtedly, considering international practices of countries that are successful in the field of education benefits the plans of improving the Saudi education system. In this chapter, the education system of the United States will be a model of comparison in the four targeted areas of school improvement.

Area One: Professional Development in the United States

Learning Forward Association (2015), previously known as The National Staff Development Council (NSDC), has defined Professional Development as "activities that (a) are an integral part of school and local educational agency strategies for providing educators (including teachers, principals, other school leaders, specialized instructional support personnel, paraprofessionals, and, as applicable, early childhood educators) with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet the challenging State academic standards, and (b) are sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused" (Definition of Professional Development section, para. 3).

Hirsh (2009) described the professional development process as teacher meetings that are scheduled orderly to allow teachers share accountability for their students' achievement through learning teams such as grade-level teams or content-area teams. These learning teams work in a cycle of ongoing improvement starting with identifying the areas of student needs after analyzing student data, determining areas in which teachers' need further learning, finding and developing learning practices to meet
teachers' needs, designing effective lesson plans and assessments, implementing new instructions in their classrooms, modifying their practices to be more powerful, studying their influence on student learning, and iterating the cycle with new objectives. Since increasing student achievement is linked to the quality of the professional development provided for their teachers (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009), it is substantially imperative to study the characteristics and domains of the effective professional development. According to DeMonte (2013) high-quality professional development must (a) support the objectives of the school, the standards and assessments of state and district, and other professional development activities, (b) concentrate on core content and designing teaching instructions for it, (c) provide active learning opportunities for effective teaching practice, (d) offer opportunities for teachers' collaboration, and (e) contain monitoring and ongoing feedback.

Desimone and Garet (2015) provided a conceptual framework for effective professional development that agrees with DeMonte's model in four characteristics which include content focus, active learning, coherence, and collaboration, and adding "sustained duration" as the fifth character. Sustained duration means that the activities of professional development are provided constantly during the school year and contains contact time for 20 hours or more. Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) agreed with the above descriptions of effective professional development. The authors defined effective professional development as, "intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice, focused on teaching and learning of specific academic content, connected to other school initiatives; and build strong working relationships among teachers"(p. 5).
Learning Forward (2015) with the contribution of 40 professional associations and education organizations, developed a framework that includes seven standards for professional learning. The standards of Learning Forward (2015) are:

1. *Learning Communities*: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.

2. *Leadership*: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

3. *Resources*: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

4. *Data*: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

5. *Learning Designs*: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

6. *Implementation*: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long term change; and
7. **Outcomes:** Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards (Standards for Professional Learning section, para.2).

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), state and federal policies are available to support the system at the school level. These policies inspire consistent teacher collaboration and professional learning. They also offer the required resources that give teachers the time and opportunity to achieve school improvement priorities. Recently, Oregon, Ohio, and Kansas among many other states, have implemented standards to ensure that all teachers are involved in effective professional development. Moreover, assessment processes have been implemented across states such as Florida, Georgia, and Kansas to determine the extent to which student learning is impacted and the degree to which teachers experience effective professional development. Particularly, Arkansas, New Jersey and Pennsylvania provide principals and teacher leaders with training and resources, thus, investing in capacity-building strategies. Stand-out high-poverty school systems like Long Beach (Calif.), Hamilton County (Tenn.), and Carmen-Ainsworth (Mich.) have prioritized collaborative learning to ensure daily learning of every student and educator.

Although states and school systems are responsible for establishing policies to effectively guide and monitor the implementation and impact of professional learning, inconsistencies have been observed in the implementation and impact of these policies from state to state (Hirsh, 2010). Recently, a Stanford University team conducted a research to identify effective professional development policies and strategies. They examined the policy frameworks that supported high levels of professional development.
activity in four states Vermont, New Jersey, Missouri, and Colorado. In 2008, the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) had selected these four states as “professionally active” due to high levels of teacher participation in professional development (Jaquith, Mindich, Wei, & Darling-Hammond, 2010). A close look at the four professionally active states revealed differences in professional development policy and implementation approaches, strategies for monitoring and delivering professional development, and levels of support and control at the state. Interestingly, these states had some similar characteristics which aided their success. The characteristics include addressing federal mandates and accountability requirements in constructive ways, adopting the Professional Learning Community model, developing multiple accountability systems, requiring induction and mentoring programs, monitoring quality, creating networks of intermediary organizations and collaborating with official organizations (Jaquith et al., 2010).

In their study of the status of professional learning in the United States, Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson (2010) found that:

1. There is a slight increase Nationwide in the percentage of teacher participation in professional development. The development areas include teachers’ content (reaching the highest rate of 88%), use of computers, reading instruction, and classroom management.

2. Year 2008, in comparison with four earlier years, recorded stability in the intensity of professional development related to teachers’ content; and in the other development areas, teachers received less intensive learning opportunities.
3. Only few teachers Nationwide received professional development for teaching limited-English proficient (LEP) students and students with disabilities.

4. In 2008, professional development experience was rated as useful or very useful by two-third of teachers. The usefulness was rated significantly higher by teachers who experienced a more intense professional development.

5. Variation in professional development participation exists across different schools’ contexts, with highest rates for urban teachers, elementary school teachers, and teachers in schools with the highest populations of low-income, minority, and LEP students.

6. Teachers reported that on the average, only 2.7 hours is spent weekly, on collaboration. Although, two-thirds of the surveyed teachers reported the availability of structured collaboration opportunities in their school.

7. Three topics were identified as top priorities for further professional development. They are content of the subject taught (23.7%), student discipline and management (19.9%), and teaching students with special needs and use of technology in instruction (13.7%). These topics had almost remained priorities from 2004 to 2008.

8. Provision of induction support has been stable for beginning teachers, however, access to these supports remain unequal. Teachers in high poverty, high-minority schools recording a significantly low percentage.

The report of Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) reveals that educators’ academic content knowledge is the focus of much of the professional development presently
available today. The current professional development also gives rising attention to mentoring support, especially for new teachers. However, across most states, districts, and schools in the United States, the kind of high-intensity, job-embedded collaborative learning that is most effective is not a common feature of professional development. According to Desimone and Garet (2015) the nature and quality of teacher professional development in the United States is influenced by several trends. One recent trend is a divergence from the common one-time workshops, where teachers meet for 1-3 hours to listen to a lecture on an isolated topic, towards professional development that seeks to implement the five core features of professional development. Another common trend is the connecting of professional development to teacher evaluations. It drives improvements in how professional development is organized, administered, and evaluated. Principals are progressively including in their yearly evaluations, measures of how well knowledge and practice teachers learned in professional development are being implemented. The increased use of video as an observation and coaching tool in the classroom is regarded as the third trend in professional development. Another potential use of video is to provide a catalogue of resources for teachers (Desimone & Garet, 2015).

Several challenges surround the new understanding and trends in teacher professional development. The tension between having multiple providers and trying to achieve coherence is one major challenge. This has resulted in an often-fragmented teachers’ experience, with slight continuity across professional learning opportunities, and little increasing design. The fact that professional learning has many different purposes poses another challenge. While some purposes are designed to support the
implementation of a new curriculum or program, others are to improve teachers’ content knowledge in a discipline, focus on special populations, and some are designed to support teachers in learning new approaches to pedagogy. Additionally, the professional development is funded and governed in several ways. Even though the “one-shot” workshop has been confirmed to be unsuccessful, it is still in use in some districts. This is due to either lack of the appropriate resources or capacity to design and make provisions for more coherent, comprehensive professional development opportunities for teachers. Most districts are faced with the problems associated with the multiplicity of professional development, thus, making its study, teacher professional development, and keeping track of their development very challenging (Desimone & Garet, 2015).

Area Two: Student-Centered Learning Model in the United States

In a diverse society like the United States, the education system is designed with the intention to fulfill the various needs of all students. It must "provide a more personalized, rigorous, and collaborative learning environment that moves from teacher-directed, one-size-fits-all instructional strategies toward a learner-centered model"(Alliance for Excellent Education [AFEE], 2012, p.2). A student-centered model is sometimes referred to as learner-centered or self-directed model. Many researchers and authors differently define the student-centered model. For example, Filatova (2015) considered the model as teaching approach or a method where "a student is placed in the center of learning and he/she is active, learns while being engaged in an activity, and bears primary responsibility for the outcomes of this activity"(p. 1). In his book Curriculum in Context, Chiarelott (2006) mentioned student-centered learning as one of the effective learning models that is called Self-directed learning model. He described it
as a model that "provides students with the opportunity to plan, implement, and assess their own learning through individual and group projects"(p. 121). According to Mariora (2014), student-centered learning is an active learning approach that allows students to "construct knowledge and understanding based on what they already know and / or believe. Often these items ("pre-knowledge", acquired in informal contexts) are reasonable and appropriate ideas in different situations"(p. 3). Additionally, Mariora (2014) mentioned that in order for students to build new concepts, they modify their current knowledge, add to it, and sometimes change it when they are not satisfied with the procedure. AFEE (2012) also mentioned that digital learning plays significant role in improving student-centered instruction since it provides variety of choices and opportunities for both teachers and students.

Student-centered learning model benefits students in many ways. According to Overby (2011), it helps in creating a trust culture in the classroom. Students share their thoughts and feelings and discuss their problems, hence, allowing their teacher to understand their needs and provide guidance and assistance to meet them. In addition, working in groups also creates an environment of motivation that challenges students to increase their level of critical thinking. Moreover, mixing students from different academic levels, genders, interests, and personalities to work together in groups helps to decrease the practices of "cliques" that frequently appear in schools. It also allows students to build their self-esteem and communication skills (Overby, 2011). Marioara (2014) added that working collaboratively in groups to reach the desired goals increases students’ participation and willingness to share their thoughts and experiences, which increases the level of communication that supports their understanding. It strengthens
students' understandings through providing opportunities to transfer their knowledge to others. Jones (2007) stated that "student-centered approach helps students to develop a “can-do” attitude. Thus, effective, motivating, and enjoyable"(p. 1). According to AFEE (2012), the experience that holds students accountable for guiding and designing their learning outcomes increases their self-direction and self-motivation. It allows students to address their needs by planning, implementing, and evaluating their work.

A student-centered learning model has also shown advantages for students with special needs. According to Bill (2010), using a student-centered learning model increases their academic achievement, improves their social skills, and helps them to feel accepted by other students. Filippatou and Kaldi (2010) added that mixing students with special needs in groups or pairs to work with students of higher levels of performance motivates them to improve their work. It also provides them a chance to enhance their understanding through the assistance and explanation of their pairs or group members. Generally, student-centered learning model "has proven to take students to higher levels of critical thinking, problems solving, improvement of attitude to learn, as well as an increase in overall attendance" (Overby, 2011, p. 3). The roles of teacher and students in the student-centered model differ from those of the teacher-center model. Filatova (2015, p.1) explained these roles in her definition of student-centered model. She stated that this model "places emphasis on a student “doing” and being “active” rather than a teacher “transferring the knowledge” and a student “acquiring” it".

Jones (2007, p.25) agreed that in student-centered learning, students are not dependent on their teacher, but they work collaboratively and respectfully to accomplish their tasks and fulfill their needs. Students and their teacher work together as a team.
The role of the teacher could change according to the different situations. Teachers are "responsible for helping students work independently, monitoring them while they’re working together, and giving them feedback afterward. In a whole-class activity, students and the teacher interact, and students accept the authority of the teacher as their manager. When working together, students will be responsible for their own behavior and learning while the teacher walks around the classroom monitoring". The learning model supports many educational concepts and theories. For instance, Bruner (1966) emphasized the social aspect of learning in the early '60s when defined the concept of reciprocity as “a deep human need to give a reply to another and to work together with others to achieve a goal” (as cited in Marioara, 2014, p. 3). In his view, reciprocity is an incentive for learning “where joint action is needed, when reciprocity is activated within a group to achieve a result, there seems to exist processes which stimulate individual learning processes and which lead everyone to a required competence of each group” (as cited in Marioara, 2014, p. 3). Moreover, John Dewey points out that "knowledge should be viewed as progressing out of the learner's experiences rather than as something outside of those experiences" (as cited in Parkay, Hass, & Anctil, 2010, p. 311).

The student-centered model has a significant impact on the work of schools and the responsibilities of those working in the education system. According to AFEE (2012) "education systems and schools must empower teachers to apply their pedagogical knowledge, instructional skills, and digital tools and resources to meet the needs of individual students. When building a strong learner-centered culture, all stakeholders in the school need to have a common understanding of both the goal and the path. Educators need administrator support, professional learning opportunities, resources, and
a supportive infrastructure" (p. 2). Finally, student-centered learning assists students to be prepared for college and career. AFFE (2012) identified some qualities of student-centered learning instruction that lead to fulfill this need. Student-centered learning instruction must be: "(a) rigorous and based on college- and career-ready expectations; (b) personalized; (c) collaborative, relevant, and applied; and (d) flexible, with learning taking place anytime, anywhere" (p. 4).

Chiarelott (2006) identified five characteristics of self-directed learning that differentiates it from teacher-directed learning. Two of these characteristics emphasize the different roles of students and teachers in self-directed learning. First, self-directed learning regards to students’ need to control their lives while teacher-directed learning assumes that students depend basically on their teacher who is responsible for identifying the teaching contents, methods as well as time. Second, self-directed learning believes that based on their growing experiences, students are qualified to determine what they need to learn in the future with the use of their textbooks and other resources. On the other hand, teacher-directed learning believes that the experiences of the teacher are more important and valued than the experience of the student.

Chiarelott (2006) provided a model of five phases for a self-directed learning process. The process shows how students are empowered to design the instruction that meet their personal needs. The five phases of the process that learners go through are (1) identifying their learning needs (2) determining learning outcomes to meet these needs (3) finding resources for learning, (4) choosing and applying learning practices and approaches, and (5) evaluating learning outcomes by using self-assessment tools. This process takes a place in the classroom when students work in groups as a team, which
exposes the talents of each student (Overby, 2011). Jones (2007) added that students could work individually when they prepare their thoughts and work on written notes before gathering with the group for sharing ideas and discussions. They also could interact with the teacher and other students in the class through asking questions and brainstorming during the whole process.

**Area Three: Developing Students' Core Life Skills in the United States**

In the report of Global Evaluation of Life Skills Education Programmes, UNICEF (2012) stated that "for more than two decades, life skill education is important in preparing both young and adults to collaborate and facilitate everyday challenges and risks. Thus, encouraging beneficial participation in the society. Furthermore, it plays an important role in quality of education via strategies that emphasize the acquisition of competencies, content relevant to everyday life as well as the use of teaching and learning methods to improve proficiencies and encourage cooperative learning"(p. 7). Life Skills are often referred to as social and emotional learning, personal and interpersonal education, and character building (UNICEF, 2012). Many international organizations have made attempts to define life skills. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) has defined life skills as "abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (as cited in GPYE, 2014, p. 3). In addition, UNICEF (2012) has defined them as a "large group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that can help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills that may help lead a healthy and productive life"(p. 1). Furthermore, GPYE (2014) has identified them as "a comprehensive set of universal cognitive and non-cognitive
skills and abilities, connecting behavior, attitudes, and knowledge, which youth can develop and retain throughout their lives. Life skills increase young people’s well-being and help them to develop into active and productive members of their communities" (p. 3).

UNICEF (2012) pointed out that even though the term "life skills" is difficult to be defined based on the challenges of determining the skills which are relevant for life, most definitions agree on personal, social, and psychosocial skills. GPYE (2014) added that the common elements of the previous definitions include "the psychosocial, interpersonal, and emotional nature of life skills, as well as their function in enabling youth to overcome challenges, act positively, and develop to their fullest potential"(p. 3). Definition of life skills differs from one culture to another. However, WHO (as cited in UNICEF, 2012, p. 8) recognized five basic areas of life skills that are common across cultures. "They are (1) decision-making and problem-solving, (2) creative thinking and critical thinking, (3) communication and interpersonal skills; (4) self-awareness and empathy, and (5) coping with emotions and coping with stress". The International Youth Foundation (YIF) (as cited in GPYE, 2014, p. 10) identified a list of core life skills for any life skills program. "They are self-confidence, respecting self and others, interpersonal skills (empathy, compassion), managing emotions, personal responsibility (including dependability, integrity, and work ethics), positive attitude and self-motivation, conflict management, teamwork, communication (listening, verbal, and written), cooperation and teamwork, creative thinking, critical thinking and problem solving, and decision making" (p. 10).
From an educational perspective, the United States based Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (as cited in UNICEF, 2012, p. 8) has identified "five core groups of social and emotional competencies. This include (1) self-awareness: accurately assessing one’s feelings, interests, values, and strengths, (2) Self-management: regulating one’s emotions to handle stress, and controlling impulses, (3) Social awareness: being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others (4) Relationship skills: establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships, resisting inappropriate social pressure, and resolving conflict, and (5) Responsible decision-making: making decisions based on appropriate social norms, respect for others, and applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations."

Finally, after a study of the several sets of core life skills determined by United Nations agencies and other organizations, the UNICEF (2012) has combined life skills in three wide categories of generic life skills. These categories are: (1) Cognitive: critical thinking and problem-solving skills for responsible decision-making, (2) Personal: skills for awareness and drive and for self-management, and (3) Interpersonal: skills for communication, negotiation, cooperation, and teamwork, and for inclusion, empathy, and advocacy. A recent set of life skills was identified in addition to career skills by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21). According to P21 (2015), life and career skills are (1) Flexibility and adaptability: adapt to change and be flexible, (2) Initiative and self-direction: manage goals and time, work independently, and be self-directed learners, (3) Social and cross-cultural skills: interact effectively with others and work effectively in diverse teams (4) Productivity and accountability: manage projects and produce results
Leadership and responsibility: guide and lead others and be responsible to others.

Developing life skills was presented in the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All (EFA) in 2000 as a serious contributor to education's quality as an objective itself and as content-related skills that support programs on HIV and AIDS and promote students’ health and safety. The most distinguished content-area life skills curricula—globally—are life skills-based health education, life skills-based education for HIV prevention, human rights, citizenship, and social cohesion, and disaster risk reduction and environmental protection (UNICEF, 2012). Life skills education curriculum has two models. The product approach, which is an organized and clear model, is popular in education systems where there is a lack of teachers who are trained sufficiently. The other model is the process approach, which is a student-centered model that stresses activities like critical thinking and reflection. Applying this model in developing countries could be challenging due to the inadequate resources and professionalism. Furthermore, delivering life skills education takes many forms in curriculum. They might be integrated into the curriculum, be designed as a separate curriculum, or provided in extra-curricular activities. The integrated approach is considered as the most efficient way for delivering life skills (UNICEF, 2012). When designing separate life skills curriculum, the content must meet student needs by balancing a combination of skills that all students need in their daily life. "Multiple lessons could be used to cover each core life skill or more than one could be addressed as a combination. Furthermore, relationships are represented between interconnected skills in the curriculum wherever appropriate. It is recommended that more of the basic skills
should be covered much early in the curriculum and be used as prerequisites before addressing more advanced skills" (GPYE, 2014, p. 8).

Interactive learning activities are effective methods for teaching life skills. UNICEF (2012, p. 25) provided examples of interactive learning activities that include class discussion, brainstorming, role play, games and simulations, case studies, debate, and storytelling. These activities help in increasing students' "self-expression, promotion of emotional intelligence, empathy, interpersonal communication, cooperation, negotiation, examining or analyzing different perspectives, constructive argument and problem-solving". These activities are used to both explore and develop content-related knowledge, attitudes as well as skills. The activities also provide new information for young people to engage and enable them to learn from their experiences.

Extra-curricular activities as well are effective sources for learning core life skills. They contribute to students' personal and social growth. "A lot of students would prefer to engage more in activities outside their classrooms" (Lawhorn, 2008, p. 16). Massoni (2011) defined extra-curricular activities as "activities that students participate in that do not fall into the realm of normal curriculum of schools" (p. 1). They are available in all levels of American schools, and they take many forms such as sports, clubs, governance, student newspaper, music, art, and drama (Massoni, 2011).

Since the primary motive for students to participate in these activities is their personal interest, they get a chance to meet other people who share the same interest with them. This environment of shared interests increases the opportunity for students to establish new relationships that help in building their social skills such as teamwork and leadership (Lawhorn, 2008). Students who participate in extra-curricular activities show
more ability to make friends, adjust to change, and practice leadership when they further their education in college and university settings (Wilson, 2009). Self-awareness is one of the important social skills that can be learned from participating in extra-curricular activities. For instance, participating in athletics provide opportunities to interact with peers, follow the leader's guidance, and collaborate to reach the goal of the team. This contributes to the development of student's self-identity and self-concept (Wilson, 2009). In addition, commitment to attending sports practices and drills increases student's responsibility. Therefore, when they succeed, they get rewarded and celebrate their achievement, which enhances their self-respect, self-esteem, and self-confidence (Massoni, 2011). In conclusion, many core life skills can be learned from participating in extra-curricular activities. Participant students get opportunities to enjoy their time after school while developing significant life skills that benefit them in many ways.

**Area Four: School-Family Partnership in the United States**

The research of Eccles and Harold (1996), Epstein (2001), Henderson and Mapp (2002), and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) show that families have the most substantial impact on their children's learning and achievement in school (as cited in Anderson-Butcher et al., 2004). It also indicated that school practices significantly affect family involvement and support. In addition, Epstein et al. (2009) suggested that the way educators view their students influences the way they view their families. In other words, the more educators care about their students, the more their relationship with their families becomes meaningful. When families understand their role as partners with the school, it increases their responsibility and collaboration to participate in the development of their children.
According to Anderson-Butcher et al. (2004), family engagement and support, which are usually referred to as family involvement or family empowerment, take a place at the school and at home. Families can support their children's school by providing their services voluntarily and participating in decision making and parent-teacher conferences. They also can support their children's learning at home by providing a home environment that is aligned with the school's focus, and by communicating effectively with their teachers at school. In addition, the school can support families as well by providing programs such as adult literacy programs and family support groups, which helps them to grow their skills and capabilities. It also can link families that need support to emergency assistance and other community service providers.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) mentioned "parent and community involvement" as an important school-level factor in their "site-specific intervention" framework. This factor involves three related elements (1) Communication refers to the level of effective communication between schools and families and community. Communication frequently occurs through newsletters, phone calls, home visits, parent-teacher conferences, and internet and social media, (2) Participation refers to the level of family and community involvement in the daily process of school. Examples of family and community involvement include volunteering to help teachers and monitor students out of their classes, and (3) Governance refers to the level of parents and community involvement in the decision making associated with school policy.

According to Epstein et al. (2009), in the United States, there are many federal, state, and local policies to support families and community engagement in school. For instance, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education act, which was established
in the late 1980s, includes many research-based obligations and instructions for programs and practices family and community involvement programs. Moreover, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which was established in 2001, "outlines a "nested" system of school, district, and state requirements for developing research-based programs that involve parents in ways that contribute to student achievement and success in school. These guidelines must be met to qualify for and maintain federal funding" (Epstein et al., 2009, p. 9). Furthermore, Epstein (2005) stated that "many states and districts have developed or are preparing their own policies to guide schools in creating more systematic connections with families and with community involvement are attainable" (as cited in Epstein et al., 2009, p. 9).

In a multicultural society like in the United States, engaging all families to support the success of all students is necessary. According to Hutchins and associates (2012) (as cited in the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council [OLAC], 2016) a research on immigrant families identified five recommendations for increasing the engagement and involvement of diverse families "(1) welcome all families, (2) communicate in languages that parents understand, (3) provide parents with useful and timely information, (4) organize an intentional, well-planned partnership program, and (5) incorporate student backgrounds and family cultures into the classroom curricula" (Principles of Authentic Engagement section, para. 4).

National Parent Teacher Association (PTA), which founded 1897 as the National Congress for Mothers, is "devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of family engagement in schools" (PTA, 2016, National PTA History section, para. 2). PTA's mission is "to make every child’s potential a reality by engaging and
empowering families and communities to advocate for all children" (PTA, 2016, Mission & Values section, para.1). According to Hall, Quinn & Gollnich (2014), “the PTA (2009) has found that families' involvement in education at both home and school leads to students achieving higher grades and test scores, attending school more regularly, liking school better, behaving better at school, and being more likely to graduate and attend postsecondary education"(p. 145). They added that family involvement influences teacher attitudes and performance as well. It helps to increase their effectiveness and improve their communication with children and parents. It also helps parents to enhance their relationships with their children and teachers, and to improve their perceptions toward the school (Hall et al., 2014).

The PTA has established National Standards for Family School Partnerships. These standards offer a framework for the collaborative work of families, schools, and communities to support student success. The PTA included a goal or more for each standard to help schools applying the standards to their work. The standards and their goals are:

1. **Welcoming all families**
   a. Creating a welcoming climate
   b. Building a respectful, inclusive school community

2. **Communicating effectively**
   a. Sharing information between the school and families

3. **Supporting student success**
   a. Sharing information about student progress
   b. Supporting learning by engaging families
4. Speaking for every child
   a. Understanding how the school system works
   b. Empowering families to support their own and other children’s success in school

5. Sharing power
   a. Strengthening the family’s voice in shared decision making
   b. Building families’ social and political connections

6. Collaborating with the community
   a. Connecting the school with community resources (PTA, 2014).

In addition, Epstein designed a framework of six major types of involvement based on many studies and many years of work with educators and families. The framework helps schools in designing programs for school-family partnership.

According to Epstein et al. (2009), "the six types of involvement are:

1. Parenting: Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.
2. Communicating: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children's progress.
3. Volunteering: Recruit and organize parent help and support.
4. Learning at Home: Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.
5. Decision Making: Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.
6. Collaborating with the Community: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development" (p. 16).

Epstein et al. (2009) suggested that creating an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) in each school is necessary. The ATP's job is to improve school plans and practices of family and community involvement for student success by using the framework of six types of involvement. "There are five important steps that any school can take to develop more positive school, family, and community connections: (1) create an action team for partnerships, (2) obtain funds and other support; (3) identify starting points, (4) develop a one-year action plan; and (5) continue planning, evaluating, and improving programs"(p. 19-23). The Center for Advances in Public Engagement (2008) (as cited in OLAC, 2016) provided 10 core principles for establishing successful public engagement that are relevant to the work of districts and schools. These "10 core principles are:

1. Begin by listening
2. Attend to people's leading concerns.
3. Reach beyond the usual suspects.
4. Frame issues for deliberation.
5. Provide the right type and amount of information at the right time.
6. Help people move beyond dreaming.
7. Expect obstacles and resistance.
8. Create multiple, varied opportunities for deliberation and dialogue.
9. Respond thoughtfully and conscientiously to the public's involvement.
10. Build long-term capacity as you go" (OLAC, 2016, Core Principals section).

Finally, Anderson-Butcher et al. (2004) identified three key components for an effective family engagement:

1. Strong commitment by educators, service providers and youth development leaders to view families as partners.

2. Comprehensive plan of family engagement that links to school improvement and includes programs, services, and strategies for "high priority" families.

3. Infrastructure supports that include a team of representative parents and family friendly facilities at school.
Chapter five

Implications and Recommendations

After researching the identified areas of both Saudi Arabia and United States, it became clear that there are many differences between the two education systems. One of the main differences noticed during the research process was the limited approved resources available in the Saudi education system, particularly in the second area, the student-centered learning model, and the third area, developing students' core life skills. On the other hand, there were varieties of resources in the American education system that are rich in content and easy to achieve in all four areas. Another noticed difference is the absence of national standards for the practices related to professional development, and family involvement in Saudi Arabia. The American education system has national standards set by organizations- not necessarily governmental agencies- to guide the practices of educators. Areas such as professional development and school-family partnership are supported by federal, state, and local policies in the United States that also guide their practices.

Finding definitions that are approved by the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia or any other higher authority for the main areas of the research such as professional development, student-centered learning, and life skills was not an easy process. Having an agreement on these definitions would facilitate the work of improving the areas related to them. The same thing was noticed with studies and statistics about the four areas in Saudi Arabia. In contrast, approved definitions, studies, and statistics were available for the four areas in the United States. The final general observation is that the majority of tasks related to the four areas chosen in this paper are assigned – at the school
level- to the vice principle for educational affairs, which somehow isolates the school leader from being involved in the school processes relevant to student learning.

The following section will compare the Saudi education system and the American education system in each area separately. It will highlight the gaps in the Saudi education system, and provide some recommendations for improving practices that close these gaps based on the American education system.

Area One: Professional Development

The education system in Saudi Arabia needs to set a clear definition for professional development (PD) that states its purpose and focus. It is important to move away from the one-time workshop concept, which is usually ineffective, to more planned, organized, and sustained PD programs (Desimone & Garet, 2015). There are some factors that need to be considered in the Saudi system to help increasing the effectiveness of PD programs. First, designing the PD program in the beginning of the school year, and linking it to the school plan increases the effectiveness of the program. Giving school leaders the authority to plan intensive and integral programs based on their school goals and the needs of educators in their schools increases effectiveness. This factor also facilitates the work of editing and changing the plan when needed without going through a bureaucratic process to get permissions from higher authorities. Moreover, it is beneficial to set a training program for new teachers that is provided before the beginning of school year so that all teachers start PD program with the same entry level. Training programs can be provided online, and supported by the "Mentor" strategy through the first semester for new teachers.
Recommendations for improving this area include:

1. Setting an approved definition for PD that describes its purpose, focus, process, and standards. The Ministry of Education or any other approved organization can be responsible for setting the definition, but schools must have the authority to design their PD programs to meet their needs and goals based on the approved definition.

2. Attending PD programs and applying what is learned can be linked to teachers' evaluation. It also can be mentioned as a clause in the job contract to guarantee teachers' commitment.

3. Designing monitoring methods and evaluation strategies for implementing the program. Data collected from monitoring and evaluation helps in improving the program quality each year.

**Area Two: Student-Centered Learning Model**

It is imperative to implement this model in the schools of the Saudi education system since most of them still use the traditional teaching model, which through the past two decades provided weak outcomes compared to the needs of the community and job market. The forms of student-centered learning mentioned in Saudi resources as implemented in Saudi schools are cooperative learning, project-based learning, and E-learning. Applying this model requires teacher training and should be included in professional development and training programs.

The significance of applying this model comes from its ability to meet the diverse needs of students, which is needed in the Saudi education system. It also strengthens the
concept of group work that gives the students an opportunity to work collaboratively. This concept conflicts with the traditional definition of "classroom management" that has been adopted by most educators in Saudi Arabia. The point must be made that effective classroom management does not conflict with group work that requires students to have discussions and move around the classroom sometimes. Additionally, applying this model develops students' skills such as responsibility, self-confidence, communication, planning, and self-awareness which links to area three, developing students' core life skills.

Recommendations for improving this area include:

1. Including the topic of student-centered learning model in teachers' training and professional development programs before applying it in schools.

2. Designing monitoring and evaluation strategies for the model implementation to improve future practices.

Area Three: Developing Students' Core Life Skills

In Saudi Arabia, there needs to be an agreement on what core life skills students should process to be socially and professionally prepared. An approved definition for core life skills at least on the national level should be developed to guide the process of integrating the skills in curriculum and extra-curricular activities, or designing a curriculum that is specialized in core life skills.

The current curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education does not cover all the types of core life skills based on the definitions provided by international organizations such as UNICEF and WHO. Additionally, extra-curricular activities have a
huge impact on developing students' core life skills, but they are not varied enough to cover all of them, and not provided in all schools in Saudi Arabia.

Recommendations for improving this area include:

1. Setting an approved definition for core life skills by the Ministry of Education or any other approved organization, or adopting one of the approved international definitions

2. Improving k-12 curriculum to include integrated core life skills.

3. Redesigning current life skills curriculum to expand its capacity to cover all types of core life skills

4. Training teachers to integrate core life skills in their instructions and teaching methods

5. Expanding the range of extra-curricular activities to include all schools in the public education system not only Tatweer schools

6. Designing monitoring and evaluation strategies to assess the effectiveness of curriculum and extra-curricular activities in developing students' core life skills

**Area Four: School- Family Partnership**

There are remarkable efforts to improve this area in the Saudi education system recently. It started with the resolution of the Minister of Education in 2014 that insured the importance of school, family, and community partnership. That led to issuing a school
guide for school, family, and community partnership by Tatweer. In 2016, the Saudi Arabia's vision emphasized the importance of this partnership by launching IRTIQAA program, and the Ministry of Education included it in its eight strategic objectives for National Transformation Program.

The concept of school-family partnership is still new in Saudi Arabia, and is still not abroad enough to cover all the aspects of the partnership that are mentioned in the resources of the American education system. Some of the points need to be considered in Saudi education system are:

1. The school and all staff members should understand the importance of this partnership and its impact in improving student achievement. Giving consideration to the partnership starts from caring for the students, which will consequently lead to caring for their families (Epstien et al., 2009).

2. Teachers need to be trained for communicating effectively with families, and this is another topic that must be included in training and PD programs.

3. Compared to the elements of parent and community involvement mentioned by Marzano et al. (2005), two of the elements are absent in Saudi schools. Participating, this includes providing opportunities for parents to participate voluntarily in the daily school process. Governance, this includes involving parents in decision-making related to their children's success. Even though school councils involve parents in decision-making, it is still ineffective method since only three parents are allowed to become members of the council, and the meetings of the council are held only twice each semester.
4. Schools in Saudi Arabia do not frequently provide support services for families such as literacy classes, workshops for helping in understanding and raising children, or training on strategies to support school instructions at home. They also do not provide support for families in need by linking them to service providers in the local community.

5. School and family partnership in Saudi Arabia is not supported by any type of policy on the national, regional, or school level.

6. School and family partnership in Saudi Arabia should consider the diverse backgrounds of families weather they differ socially, culturally, or religiously. It must create a school culture that welcomes all families for the purpose of supporting all students' learning.

7. In the Saudi education system, organizations dedicated to support school and family partnership—such as the PTA in the United States—are absent.

To summarize, according to PTA's national standards for family-school partnership (PTA, 2016), and Epstein's framework of six types of involvement (Epstein et al., 2009), four aspects of school-family partnership need to be developed in Saudi Arabia.

- Empowering parents to support their children success in school;
- Sharing power by having family voice in decision-making;
- Helping all families to establish home environment to support students;
- And; providing opportunities for parents to volunteer in school's daily processes (PTA Website, 2016; Epstein et al., 2009).
Recommendations for improving this area include:

1. In addition to the school council, there is a need to create a council for parents and teachers in the school to improve the level of involvement and the quality of partnership.

2. Setting national policies and standards by the Ministry of Education or any other approved organization to guide the work of school-family partnership.

3. Assigning a team as a part of the Committee of Family and Community Partnership to be responsible of planning for and monitoring the work of school-family partnership in the school level "Action Team for Partnership" (Epstein et al., 2009).
Conclusion

The education system in Saudi Arabia went through tremendous efforts to improve the quality of education, and consequently increase student academic achievement. These efforts include collaborating with international organizations and developed countries in the field of education such as the United States to benefit from their successful experiences, and setting a new vision for the country where education got considerable attention as a significant contributor to the development of Saudi Arabia's outcomes socially and economically.

The King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Public Education Development project (Tatweer) has been playing an important role in the improvement process since 2007. The annually issued publications and guides have been facilitating the work of schools to achieve the targeted goals of the Ministry of Education for school improvement. Additionally, the Public Education Evaluation Commission (PEEC) has been the responsible authority for evaluating education in Saudi Arabia by setting standards, key indicators, and national tests to measure the quality of the education system and determine the areas that need improvement.

In this paper, four areas of school improvement were targeted to be studied based on the current situation of them in Saudi Arabia, and according to the strategic objectives set by the Ministry of Education for the National Transformation Program 2020, which works in accordance with the Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. The targeted four areas of school improvement are: professional development, student-centered learning model, developing student's core life skills, and school-family partnership. The strategy used to study the improvement approaches for these areas was by comparing them with the
situation of the same areas in the United States. Many differences appeared during the research, which guided to many suggested practices and recommendations for improvement. Assuring the alignment of the suggested American practices for improvement with the Saudi education system was put into consideration.

In conclusion, although the Saudi education system has been going through considerable reforming efforts in the last decade, the need of continuing the process of improvement is still persistent. Having a shared vision for Saudi Arabia 2030 enlightens the work of all Saudi citizens to work toward the goals of this vision. Educators as Saudi citizens can provide a huge contribution to the development of the Kingdom through taking the responsibility of improving the education system in all aspects to guarantee a better future for our children and our country.
References


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