

The Political, Socio-Economic and Cultural impacts of
the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP)
in Saudi Arabia: An exploratory Study

Kholoud T. Hilal

Bachelor of English Linguistics and Literature (King Abdul-Aziz University,
Saudi Arabia), Master of Marketing (Griffith University, Australia)

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment for the requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of New England

31 October 2014

Declaration

I, Kholoud Hilal, certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature

Date

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the author.

31/10/2014

Acknowledgements

Many people contributed to this study in innumerable ways and I am grateful to each and every one of them, and to God who put these people in my way to make my PhD possible. First and foremost, I would like to thank my Principal Supervisor, Professor Larry Smith. I am most appreciative of his patience, generosity with his time, advice, assistance with data and providing resources, and his tolerance. Without his outstanding and unceasing support, this project would not have been possible. Equally, many great thanks are due to Professor Kay Harman, my Co-supervisor, who was very clear and insightful in directing me. Her instructions were always very simple, rich, clear and to the point. Her calm voice, nice smile and assurance that “you will be fine” always helped to relieve my stress. The third person to thank is Dr. Brian Denman who inspired me to research this topic. Dr. Denman encouraged me to write and publish journal articles and present them at conferences in different countries around the world. Professor Smith’s, Professor Harman’s, and Dr. Brian’s encouragement, support and enthusiasm were important for the completion of this project.

Similar great appreciation must be paid to my great family. Thank you Dad, Tariq Hilal, for your unforgettable financial and emotional support, and many thanks to my Mum, Feryal Raffah, who always hid her tears every time I flew to Australia to pursue this degree. Thanks to my Grandpa and Grandma whose dreams for me have been realised. And I will not forget my other Grand Mum who passed away while I was doing this research. Many sincere thanks to her spirit. I am also grateful to my cousins (Nesreen Hilal, Sara Hilal, Nedaa Hilal, Lamya Al-Shareef, Raya Al-Shareef, Maram Al-Shareef, and Nermeen Hilal) who helped distribute the online survey to Saudi students who were studying overseas. All these people in my family, including my brother and sister, have always provided unwavering love and

encouragement. Thank you for believing in me.

I am appreciative of the Saudi Cultural Mission in the United States for distributing my survey to some of their Saudi students. Also, I am so appreciative of the United Arab Emirate's (UAE's) Cultural Mission in Canberra and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the UAE, which distributed my survey to its overseas students with the cooperation of UAE's cultural missions around the world. In particular, I would like to thank Mr. Khalid Butrus in the UAE's cultural mission in Canberra, Noora Al-Zaabi, the Academic advisor for scholars in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHE), Fatema Al-Koor, an advisor at MoHE and Hanan Al-Ameri, an administrative assistant at the MoHE.

I also want to extend my gratefulness to each of the 30 students who agreed to be interviewed, and to all students who filled out my online survey and shared their perspectives with me.

I cannot thank enough the participants in the focus group Dr Abdulaziz Bin Taleb, Professor Larry Smith, Dr. Abdulhalim Mazi, Professor Geoffrey Elliot, Dr. Fawzi Bukhari, Mr. Abdullah Alanazi and Dr. Brian Denman.

Last but not least, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my husband, Sultan Dablood, who provided special help with technical problems. His patience and understanding were greatly appreciated. He also took good care of our daughter, Rama, when I had to attend many conferences outside Australia. Thanks to Rama for her patience with me. I could not give her all the time she needed as the PhD required and consumed most of my time during my candidature. Finally, I am grateful for the safe arrival of my son, Abraham, who was delivered in the last year of my candidature.

Thanks to each and every one of these people for your support and being there for me from the very beginning.

Abstract

This study focuses on the social, political and economic impacts of the King Abdullah overseas Scholarship Program (KASP) in Saudi Arabia. Established in 2006, the primary aim of KASP is to support the scientific and technological development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by significantly enhancing the professional capability of its workforce and by establishing strong international scientific and economic networks. KASP is the largest student scholarship program ever supported by a nation state, sponsoring over 185,000 students at an annual cost of almost \$US6 billion.

The aims of this study were to investigate: the social, economic and political impacts of the scheme for the recipients and for the nation; the extent to which the Program's recipients and the Saudi nation have received value for investment from KASP; new opportunities and challenges for Saudi Arabia that have arisen from the KASP scheme; and in what ways the Program might be improved.

An exploratory case study approach was employed for this study because it allowed a range of qualitative and quantitative data to be collected and analysed in order to provide important insights regarding the nature and impact of KASP. A descriptive survey of Saudi KASP recipients was used for collecting measurable data, while interviews and a focus group were used for the purpose of understanding and interpreting the quantitative data collected. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the quantitative data collected through the survey, and the technique of thematic analysis was used to identify the major issues and themes to emerge from the qualitative data collected through the survey, interviews and focus group.

The findings of this study strongly suggest that the nature and outcomes of the KASP program can be explained through the interaction of three continua: an *Economic-Focus Continuum* which defines the tension between the traditional internal-focussed economy of Saudi Arabia and the desire expressed in Saudi Arabia's strategic plans to become significant participants in the global economy; an *Education-Focus Continuum* which defines the tension between the traditional Saudi teaching and learning focus and the teaching and learning approaches and processes that underpin 'best practice' in international education; and a *Cultural Continuum* which defines the tension between traditional Islamic/ Saudi culture and the 'international' cultural and behavioural norms that the KASP recipients will need to successfully engage with in their host countries. KASP is designed as a primary driver of the international economic competitiveness of the Kingdom, but in so doing, the evidence provided by this exploratory case study suggests that it is creating significant tensions and challenges for traditional Saudi cultural and behavioural norms as well as for traditional Saudi approaches to teaching and learning. The real challenge for the Saudi Government in the future implementation of the KASP scheme, then, is: how to achieve the economic and educational goals it has set for the country without undermining the cultural and religious pillars on which the Kingdom is built.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: NATURE OF THE STUDY

Aims, Scope and Focus	1
Aims of the Study	3
Statement of the Problem	3
Research Questions	4
Types of Higher Education International Student Scholarships	5
<i>Government incoming scholarships</i>	5
<i>Government outgoing scholarships</i>	6
<i>Non-government incoming scholarships</i>	7
<i>Non-government outgoing scholarships</i>	7
Background and Context	8
<i>Saudi Arabia: geographical and educational features</i>	8
Reasons for establishing the KASP scheme	13
<i>Reason 1: KASP was founded on a political ground</i>	13
<i>Reason 2: KASP was founded on an economic ground</i>	15
<i>Reason 3: KASP was founded on a socio-cultural ground</i>	16
Research design adopted	17
Role of the researcher	19
Significance of the Study	20
Key Concepts and Definitions	21
Structure of the Thesis	23

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Introduction	25
The Arab-Speaking World: higher education and student mobility	25
<i>Higher education</i>	25

<i>Student mobility</i>	28
Background of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)	30
Higher education and student mobility in the Gulf Cooperation Council	31
Weaknesses of higher education system in the Gulf Arab State	34
Contemporary internal and external challenges facing Gulf Arab States	36
<i>External challenges</i>	36
<i>Internal challenges</i>	38
Summary	43

CHAPTER 3: DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

Introduction	44
The modern system of higher education in Saudi Arabia	44
Contemporary universities and tertiary level institutions in KSA	47
Saudi Arabia and the growing Internationalisation of higher education	50
King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP)	53
<i>Discipline areas supported by the KASP scheme</i>	55
<i>The vision of KASP</i>	55
<i>Distribution of the students' choices of countries</i>	61
<i>KASP's Goals</i>	63
<i>What do KASP Scholarships offer?</i>	63
Challenges of higher education in Saudi Arabia	65
Summary	66

CHAPTER 4: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction	68
International trends associated with student Mobility	69
Types of higher education International student scholarships	75
<i>Government incoming scholarships</i>	75
<i>Government outgoing scholarships</i>	77
<i>Non-government incoming scholarships</i>	80

<i>Non-government outgoing scholarships</i>	80
Benefits for students studying overseas	82
Political, economic, and social reasons for governments to support international student mobility	83
<i>Political reasons</i>	83
<i>Economic reasons</i>	87
<i>Social and cultural reasons</i>	91
Risks associated with student mobility for countries of origin	96
Gaps in the literature	99
Summary	101

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

Introduction	104
Case study research	104
Case study research design	106
<i>Unit of analysis</i>	106
<i>Research questions</i>	107
<i>Data required</i>	107
<i>Data collection and analysis plan</i>	108
Survey methodology	111
Sample for survey	113
Focus group methodology	114
Focus group participants	118
Ethic's approval	119
Conclusion	119

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS

Introduction	121
Survey Findings	122
<i>Biographic data</i>	122
<i>Data generated from the survey</i>	125
The impact of KASP on the personal level	125

The impacts of KASP on Saudi Arabia	132
Students opinions related to KASP	136
Interview Findings	139
<i>Biographic data</i>	139
<i>Data generated from the interviews</i>	141
Personal benefits associated with the foreign Scholarship program	141
Personal problems/challenges associated with studying overseas	146
Benefits for KSA associated with the Saudi Foreign scholarship programs	150
Problems for KSA associated with the Saudi Foreign scholarship programs	153
The political, Economic, and socio-cultural impacts of KASP	157
Students' recommendations and comments	157
<i>Students' recommendations/visions</i>	158
<i>Students' comments</i>	160
Summary	162

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Introduction	163
Key Issues to Emerge	164
Towards a theoretical model	172
Areas for future research	178
Conclusion	180

List of Tables

Table 1	Types of International students scholarships	5
Table 2	The allocated budget for higher education in Saudi Arabia 2008-2013	12
Table 3	Overview of GCC's higher education and government outgoing scholarship programs	32
Table 4	Top 5 Destinations for Tertiary Education for Individual GCC Country Students – Basis Year 2006	33
Table 5	Key political, economic, and socio-cultural challenges for the GCC states	39
Table 6	GCC population and percentage of expatriates compared with citizens	40
Table 7	Saudi Arabia's budget for higher education after KASP (2006-2010)	47
Table 8	Numbers and Types of Higher Education Institutions in Saudi Arabia	48
Table 9	Government outgoing scholarships to Saudi students since King Abdul-Aziz Monarch until King Abdullah	55
Table 10	Number of full-time Saudi students enrolled at universities in the Middle East	57
Table 11	Number of full-time Saudi students enrolled at universities in North Africa	57
Table 12	Number of full-time Saudi students enrolled at universities in Africa	58
Table 13	Number of full-time Saudi students enrolled at universities in North America	59
Table 14	Number of full-time Saudi students enrolled at universities in Europe	60
Table 15	Number of full-time Saudi students enrolled at universities in Australia and New Zealand	61
Table 16	Number of full-time Saudi students enrolled at universities in Asia	61
Table 17	Grand total number of Saudi students enrolled in universities outside Saudi Arabia 2006-2010	62
Table 18	The top 10 countries of origin of the enrolled international students studying in the United States (2011-2012)	73
Table 19	International scholarship recipients by country of origin 2010-2011	78
Table 20	Variables affecting the magnitude and direction of major flow patterns	81
Table 21	Survey results concerning voluntary personal information	124
Table 22	Summary of Interviewed students' demographics	140
Table 23	Summary of the political, Economic, and socio-cultural impacts of KASP according to the findings	157

List of Figures

Figure 1	Scope of the study	2
Figure 2	Map of Saudi Arabia and its borders	9
Figure 3	The influences of religion on life aspects in KSA	11
Figure 4	Historical Institutions of Higher Learning in the Middle East	27
Figure 5	Growth of the international students' numbers who studied overseas from 1975 to 2006 in OECD countries	70
Figure 6	The distribution of international students in tertiary education according to their country of destination (2009)	72
Figure 7	Top countries of origin of foreign students, by regions of the world, in 2011	74
Figure 8	Research design (Data Collection and Analysis Plan)	109
Figure 9	Challenges for overseas Saudi students	131
Figure 10	Summary of the Survey's findings	138
Figure 11	Personal benefits from studying overseas from Saudi students' Perspectives	146
Figure 12	Summary of Interviews' findings	156
Figure 13	The Economic-Focus Continuum	173
Figure 14	The Education-Focus Continuum	174
Figure 15	The Cultural Continuum	175
Figure 16	The Three Interacting Continua	175
Figure 17	The Theoretical Model for KASP	177

Acronyms

ARAMCO	Arabian American Oil Company
CHERS	Center for Higher Education Research and Studies
CMEC	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
CMSF	Canadian Merit Scholarship Foundation
DAAD	Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (German scholarship program)
EC	European Commission
ERASMUS	European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
KASP	King Abdullah Scholarship Program
KAUST	King Abdullah University for Science and Technology
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
NGO	Non government organisation
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SACM	Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
USA	The United States of America

Publications derived from this research study

As a matter of record, the following peer-reviewed publications and papers that were derived from this research into outsourcing decisions.

- 1) Denman, B. D., & Hilal, K. T. (2011). From barriers to bridges: An investigation on Saudi student mobility (2006–2009). *International Review of Education*, 57(3-4), 299-318. This paper was also published as a book chapter.
- 2) Hilal, K. T., & Denman, B. D. (2013). Education as a Tool for Peace? The King Abdullah Scholarship Program and Perceptions of Saudi Arabia and UAE post 9/11. *Higher Education Studies*, 3(2), pp.24-40.
- 3) Hilal, K. T. (2013). Between the Fears and Hopes for a Different Future for the Nation-states: Scholarship Programs in Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates from a Public Policy Standpoint. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 2(2), p195.
- 4) Alfawaz, A., Hilal, K., Alghannam, Z. (2014). Would the Educational Programs help in Solving Saudi Arabia's Employment Challenges? *International Journal of Academic Research in Economics and Management Science*, 3 (1), 24-39.