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East and the United States of America: A
Comparative Study**

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Journal of The Faculty of Education- Mansoura University

No. 121 – Jan . 2022

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Introduction

Since the dawn of the 20th century, the United States started facing global economic challenges that threatened its rapid economic growth. Consequently, local and national leaders realized that highly skilled workforce was the key for the nation to be on solid ground and to ensure the continued economic development and fiscal fitness (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). The pioneer leading advocates of junior colleges envisioned the establishment of a fairly new educational institution to bridge the gap between secondary school and four-year institutions to ensure access, affordability, and flexibility.

Inspired by this distinctively educational American innovation, educators in the Middle East adopted the idea to serve different educational purposes. This paper focuses on two Middle Eastern countries; Jordan and Saudi Arabia; as representatives of the Middle Eastern community colleges. The reason why these countries were chosen among other countries is that they represent two economic extremes of community colleges in the Middle East nowadays. Moreover, Jordan was chosen because the earliest dated community colleges in the Middle East started there, and Saudi Arabia was chosen due to the complicated structure community colleges came to be. Thus, the characteristics of these institutions will be described in these two countries and then compared to their peers in the United States of America.

Community Colleges in the U.S.A: Historical Profile

In the late nineteenth century, presidents of some elite American universities commenced a reform movement to reconstruct higher education institutions (Brint and Karabel, 1989). Starting from the 1950s with Henry Tappan at the University of Michigan through the 1970s to Nicholas Murray Butler at Columbia, David Starr Jordan at Stanford, and William Rainey Harper at Chicago, these pioneer thinkers proposed that the first two years of university were not part of university-level instruction. These influential figures had a desire to purge freshmen and sophomores from universities because they viewed the university as a place for research and training for

the intellectual elite only. Primarily, they wanted to create “pure” universities – universities freed from the responsibilities of general education. This vision was highly influenced by the German model of the highly specialized universities which led Germany to be a dominant industrial power at that time (Veysey, 1965, as cited in Brint and Karabel, 1989). In his speech, Harper stated:

The work of the freshman and sophomore years is only a confirmation of the academy or high school work. It is a confirmation not only of the subject matter but of the methods employed. It is not until the end of the sophomore year that university methods of instruction may be employed to advantage.” (Monroe 1972, as cited in Brint and Karabel, 1989, p. 24).

Many presidents of American universities in the late nineteenth century agreed with Lange’s (president of the University of California) elitist ideal to reform universities and detach the first two years out of the university’s conventional structure. They felt that the first two years of college could be handled at a reconstituted high school (Bedstein 1976, Zwerling 1976, as cited in Brint and Karabel, 1989). Brint and Karabel (1989) also argue that the growth of community colleges did not have much to do with the democratization of education. Quite the reverse, the publicity that junior colleges had was truly to get rid of students away from the university and direct them to a higher extension of high school. This saved universities from the activists who were calling for access to education while universities found peace in pursuing research and advanced professional training (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

In order to control the number of students joining the junior year, William Rainey Harper (president of the University of Chicago) was the first to propose a practical organizational structure that could help implement the elitist model. In 1892, Harper’s plan entailed purifying universities by dividing instruction at the university into two divisions—the first two years and the last two—and then by convincing high schools to provide college-level courses. By 1896, the divisions were referred to as Junior College and Senior College. Later, in 1900 Harper convinced the board of trustees to grant an associate’s degree to students who successfully finished their academic work at the Junior College. In so doing, Harper was hoping that these students will willingly quit their academic pursuit, and only the most achieving students will continue to the upper division of the university.

Harper himself stated that the main purpose of the associate's degree was to make it more tempting for students to "give up college work at the end of the sophomore year" (quoted in Zwerling 1976, as cited in Brint & Karabel, 1989). His long-term vision was that one day universities will be freed from the burden of offering such lower-division courses (Harper, 1900, as cited in Brint & Karabel, 1989). Later, Harper's lobbying among Chicago high schools finally paid dividends when J. Stanley Brown, principal of Joliet High School, decided to expand his school's curriculum to include college-level courses. By 1901, Joliet Junior College opened its doors as America's first independent public junior college.

On the other hand, Blocker, Plummer, and Richardson (1965) indicated that there were private two-year colleges established in the 1800's. Monticello College, established in 1835, and Susquehanna University, established in 1858, were both post-secondary two-year colleges that were similar in essence to the junior college. Therefore, it is so hard to exactly determine the actual birth of community colleges. Doak Campbell, past Secretary of the American Association of Junior Colleges, once said that "this junior college idea has been conceived, it was born...[but] we are not quite sure of its parentage" (quoted in Witt, Wattenbarger, Collattscheck, & Suppiger, 1994, p. 1, as cited in Geller, 2001, p. 2). Campbell summed up the confusion of the history of junior colleges precisely.

Historically, two-year colleges can be divided into five generations (Tillery and Deegan, 1985, as cited in Geller, 2001). The first generation dates from 1900 to 1930, when two-year colleges were considered as upper extensions of high schools. The second generation, from 1930 to 1950, is referred to as the junior college generation. The third generation stretches from 1950 to 1970 and is labeled as the community college generation. The 1970-1980 generation is called the comprehensive community college. Finally, the fifth generation was from 1985 to 1999 and was not given a name (Tillery and Deegan, 1985, as cited in Geller, 2001). Geller (2001) suggests that the sixth generation of two-year colleges is to be called learning community colleges following Terry O'Banion.

Generally speaking, community colleges were originally established to provide post-secondary education for individuals who would not otherwise participate in higher education. They were recognized to provide access to those who were underachieved (Bragg, 2001). Transfer programs were the only major foci of community colleges as opposed to their current countless programs and roles. Unlike today where diverse students fill the classrooms, student population of the early junior college was not diverse—

traditional white, male, college-age students were the common in most of the classrooms (Bragg, 2001).

Community Colleges in the Middle East

As stated in the aforementioned part of this paper, Middle Eastern educators were inspired by the pioneer initiative of Joliet High School in 1901 (BuBtana and Muawad, 1985). The very beginning of junior colleges in the Middle East dates back to the mid twentieth century although it varies from one country to another. However, there are crucial questions that should be addressed in order to fully understand how these institutions work in the Middle East. Did the Middle East really need community colleges? Were community colleges established to serve similar purposes as their peers in the USA? Were they called community colleges? What were they called? How do they look like today? This section of the paper attempts to address these questions and provide a comparative analysis of the contemporary status quo of community colleges in the Middle East and the USA.

Arguably, the earliest dated post-secondary two-year institution in the Middle East that historians claim is the seed of today's community colleges is the teacher education institution in Jordan, which was established in 1951 (Alhasoon & Obaidat, 2000). Al-Hussein College pioneered the establishment of such teacher institutions although during the first two years of their inception were one-year institutions only. The purpose of these institutions was to prepare high school graduates for their compulsory pre-university teaching service. In 1953, these institutions witnessed a structural reform transforming into two-year teacher institutions and continued to be called teacher institutions until 1964 (Alhasoon & Obaidat, 2000). In their studies, Mar'i et al (1980) and Shantawi (2006) also confirmed the aforementioned historical evidence presented in the study of Alhasoon and Obaidat.

Education in Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, started in 1953 also as teacher institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. These institutions were similar in content to the Jordanian ones but different on purpose and structure. They were three-year institutions, and their purpose was to prepare skillful teachers for elementary schools due to the lack of teachers during that period. There were two admission requirements for the students to enter such institutions. Students must have received an elementary school degree and passed the vocational test which tested teaching techniques (Albusaily & Mujahid, 1992).

In 1965, the Saudi Ministry of Education developed teacher institutions in Saudi Arabia; therefore, it upgraded the existing institutions and changed their name. Teacher institutions were called the second teacher institutions in which students were required to have a preparatory school degree as an admission requirement (Albusaily & Mujahed, 1992). This change happened as a reaction to the growing number of teachers as well as the intention to increase the quality of the graduate teachers. In 1966, Ministry of Education established new institutions which was called at that time supplementary institutions but these did not last long. It was obvious that the teachers who graduated from the earlier teacher institutions lacked teaching skills (Albusaily & Mujahed, 1992).

We observe that the general shared outcome between Saudi Arabia and Jordan was to prepare some students to teach in the elementary schools due to the lack of teachers. This also encouraged government to shift the education from being traditionally organized by some religious influential figures to systematic or government-based education. The other main reason was to provide education for the biggest cohort of society, the children in that time (Shantawi, 2006). Comparing the situation in the United States of America at this time, the 1950s, to the situation in the Middle East, one would easily conclude that American higher education has far surpassed that of the Middle East.

Brint and Karabel (1989) call the 1946-1970 the “takeoff period.” During the post-war era, USA’s economy was refreshed by the “boost that the war production had given the economy” (Brint and Karabel, 1989, p. 67). This economic increase entailed federal acts to support education. Among the entities that took part in the advancement of education in the USA was the Truman Commission that called for equal educational opportunity. This commission included the junior college in its plans and emphasized terminal education. By 1958, American junior colleges enrolled approximately one out of four new freshmen.

Going back to Jordan, in 1972, institutions of vocational training were founded to prepare workforce. Therefore, these institutions started teaching engineering and other industrial profession majors (Obidate, 1983). By the late seventies, education authorities found out that the goals of teacher institutions had not only been successfully achieved, but also a surplus of teachers was sent outside the country. Consequently, the government shifted their focus towards new goals to prepare workforce to meet the emerging need of the job market (Mar’I et al, 1980). On the other hand, due to the overpopulation of graduates of high school, Jordanian

universities were not able to receive all these students. As a result, students were encouraged to join the two-year institutions to be able to find jobs when they graduate (Muhafza, 1983).

Put differently, by 1980, Jordan had sufficient teachers, and teachers had to go to four-year institutions to graduate with a degree as the Jordanian government mandated to enhance the teaching staff in the country. On the other hand, coping with the advancement of technology at that time, educators recommended that teacher institutions be used to serve new emerging purposes of the job market. Educators noticed that there was a shortage of technical and professional workers, especially in the fields of engineering, nursing, agriculture, and social services along with providing continual education for a significant number of adults (Alhasoon & Obaidat, 2000). Therefore, teacher institutions changed their names to community colleges providing the community with the new needs and therefore serving different purposes (Obidat, 1983; Muhafza, 1983). Historians reported that there were 47 private and public community colleges—twenty private and fifty public—founded in Jordan and teaching more than 70 different majors (Shantawi, 2006; Mar'I, 1983).

Featuring single gender educational institutions, women institutions in Saudi Arabia were inaugurated in 1976 by the Saudi General Supreme Committee for Girls Education to graduate female teachers in which having a middle school was the admission requirement. After that, in 1980 junior college was founded as an institution to prepare female teachers for elementary schools and was administered by the Ministry of Education (Alrwaf, 2008). Most importantly, there was a discrepancy within the literature regarding women's institutions in the 1980s and 1990s. Not much was said about these institutions and what changes they had to undergo.

On the other hand, in 1976 Saudi junior college was founded as an institution to prepare male teachers for elementary schools which was administered by Ministry of Education (Alrwaf, 2008). After that, male teacher institutions in Saudi Arabia witnessed a radical change in structure, yet the purpose persisted and continued to be the same. In 1988, the two-year teacher institutions became four-year institutions and started granted bachelor degrees. This move caused a problem to later identify those institutions as junior colleges, so the identity crisis of such institutions started. These institutions were called teacher colleges. Thus, two-year institutions started fading away. Nevertheless, it is essential to point out here that whatever change took place, it all started slowly and only in big cities first (Alrwaf, 2008).

By the beginning of the 1990s, Jordan started facing serious and decisive economic challenges, and a lot of community college graduates had difficulty finding jobs. The job market was flooded by the graduates of the 45 community colleges, so unemployment rate increased significantly and there were more graduates than the country actually needed. The problem persisted and that caused some community colleges to close. In his study, Murad (2012) stated that the problem happened due to two major issues. First, some students graduated with unneeded majors in the job market along with the abundance of many other graduates who had difficulty finding jobs. Second, community colleges were not favored by students anymore as in the job competition pendulum undoubtedly swung back to bachelor degree holders who were collecting most of the jobs.

By 1996, Albulqa'a University in Jordan was established to provide a solution to the community college problem (Shantawi, 2006). What happened was that the government decided to unify the administration of all community colleges under one university, Albulqa'a University. It was clear that community colleges were not updated by the new emerging needs of the community and did not perform serious feasibility studies for their programs. Albulqa'a University acted as the top management of all community colleges guiding their programs and carefully coordinated their programs. The main responsibility of this university was to make sure that there was a balance between the outcomes of these community colleges and that no programs were redundant in many community colleges which will cause a problem to the job market (Shantawi, 2006).

Diverted Purposes & Identity Crisis in Middle Eastern Community Colleges

In 1983, Saudi Arabia founded Technical and Vocational Training Corporation, which became responsible for all vocational and technical institutions. Meanwhile, this governmental organization established more technical institutions in some other cities (Alrwaf, 2008). In 2000 the number of technical institutions administered by Technical & Vocational Training Corporation became more than ten institutions. On the other hand, after teacher institutions were changed into four-year institutions in 1989 in Saudi Arabia, the identity of such institutions became a thorny issue. Some educators still referred to them as junior colleges, but some others called them colleges because they started granting bachelor degrees and were also part of the Technical & Vocational Training Corporation. This contributed to the identity crisis of community colleges afterwards as well.

In Jordan, currently there are more than ten primary academic departments in every community college, and within each department there are several disciplines (Shantawi, 2006); the academic profession department which offers 16 different majors, the engineering profession department which offers 33 various majors, business profession department which offers eight majors, medical profession department with eight majors, social work department offering eight majors, and agriculture career with two majors (Mar'i et. al ,1980). In sum, there are 45 community colleges in Jordan. Twenty five of these colleges are private—the Ministry of Education administers 13 of them and the remaining 12 come under the Ministry of Education (Mar'I et al, 1980).

Adding to the confusion of the structure of these institutions in Saudi Arabia, the 1990s witnessed a growth of technical institutions, but the structure was very different of each and every one. For example, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Communication and Information and Technology started their own technical two-year institutions. These institutions were founded to serve different purposes and took different structures (Alrwaf, 2008). Alaghbari (2002) stated that there were many reasons for the establishment of such institutions. One the one hand, graduates of high schools could not join universities due to their huge numbers. On the other hand, the society's need for professional workforce in oil companies encouraged students to join such institutions and graduate to the work place (Alaghbari, 2002).

It was not until 1997 that Saudi Arabia established an educational institution and called it community college (Alshathri, 2003). The Ministry of Higher Education mandated that every Saudi university establish a community college or two under its supervision. There were two main purposes of this decision. First and foremost, they were established to be able to receive the high school graduates who were more than what the universities could handle. Second, the community colleges were called upon to provide the market with more professional laborers in different specialized majors. Regarding those who joined community college due to the disability to join a four-year institution, they were face with two options; either to receive supplementary qualification and graduate with an associate degree, or to prepare for admission to four-year institutions. The majority, 80%, of community college graduates do not make it to the university (Alaghbari, 2002).

One of the problems that community college graduates faced was that only 6.7% male and 1.03% female community college graduates have

the opportunity to get a job (Alrwaf, 2008). The root to this problem is that 67% of the job opportunities in the country are occupied by foreign staff. On the other hand, it is known that the majority of the graduate students in Saudi Arabia would get a state job, but recently the opportunity of getting such jobs diminished, so the students started looking for jobs in the private marketplace. However, the private marketplace claimed that the community college graduates do not meet their quality standards, which encouraged them to enlarge the number of foreign workers. Therefore, the problem even got worse (Alrwaf, 2008).

Alshantawi (2008), argued that Jordanian students who go to community college to transfer to the university face many obstacles. By the end of the second year at the community college, students are given a comprehensive test that decides whether the student is allowed to continue their higher education or not. Another obstacle is that a lot of universities have their own admission standards and do not cooperate with the graduate students of community colleges, which is another barrier. Strikingly, only around 10% successfully make it to the university. Therefore, the contemporary status quo of community colleges is threatened as eleven community colleges closed in the past eight years (Alwabli, 1979).

Conclusion

Since their inception, two-year institutions have changes their names and purposes several times in either in the USA or in the Middle East. Elitists are egalitarians continue to argue about the purpose of existence of such institutions, but regardless of that, they continue to serve among the community. American community colleges are accused of diverting students from going to four-year institutions and statistics have shown that, “approximately 70% of two-year college entrants ... say their educational goal is to obtain a bachelor’s degree ... but only about 15 percent ... do” (Brint, 2003).

Diverting students or not, this seems not to be a problem at all for Middle Eastern community colleges. The problem that Middle Eastern community colleges, both in Saudi Arabia and in Jordan, seems to be economic related. Unemployment and the lack of industry in both countries resulted in high rates of unemployment. Graduates filled the limited industrial needs of the community, but the remaining graduates were left fighting to get more education and training and looking for jobs outside their countries. In Jordan precisely, the problem is very serious as some educators envision the imminent extinction of community colleges if no serious efforts are made to help revive the purposes of two-year institutions.

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