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ABSTRACT

Using questionnaire data collected in 2000 from 524 senior general high school students in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, researchers explored the gap between national development goals and student educational interests. They analyzed the relationship between available curriculum and student perceptions of the curriculum's ability to prepare them for the awaiting labor market. Some of the findings are as follows: only 22.6% of students agreed that the general high school curriculum prepared them to work in the labor market, whereas 70.7% agreed that students should have some training before graduation to help them succeed; up to 82% of students did not feel that their high schools provided information about post-high school opportunities; and most students relied upon sources of information other than their high schools to find out about post-high school opportunities. Findings suggest that the vocational curriculum geared towards relieving unemployment in Saudi Arabia does not meet student needs and expectations of their place in the labor market. The dominant factor in the Saudi Arabian context for school to work transition is the significant influences of parents and friends regarding students' post-high school career choices. (Includes 52 references, 7 tables, and 1 figure.) (Author/MO)

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION IN SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

In response to increased unemployment, Saudi Arabian educational policymakers and planners have considered specific school-based programs to facilitate youth employment. Since 1980, vocational education has been the official program established by policymakers and planners to address these unemployment concerns. But, while vocational training is offered in Saudi Arabia for interested students, it is not often pursued by Saudi students. This mismatch between national development goals and educational interest in Saudi Arabia is greater than policymakers and planners often expect. Using data collected in 2000 from senior general high school students in Riyadh (n=524), we analyze the relationship between the available curriculum and students' perceptions of the curriculum's ability to prepare them for the awaiting labor market. Our findings suggest that the traditional curriculum geared towards relieving unemployment in Saudi Arabia does not meet students' need and expectations concerning their place in the labor market.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION IN SAUDI ARABIA

The intent to develop moral, upstanding citizens has been an overt part of the educational curriculum in many nations. Over time, however, as educational and technological needs have changed and as democratic states have replaced authoritarian forms of government, the emphasis placed on these needs has shifted. Nations around the world, especially developed nations, have begun to recognize the importance of education as a means to develop their economies as well as providing social mobility. This fact has encouraged educational policymakers to make the effort to reform and develop their nations' educational systems (Floud & Halsey, 1961).

In particular, in many Gulf States an educational phenomenon has arisen due to the confluence of educational reform with social and economic development. This "Gulf State phenomenon" occurs because the institutional context of schooling in these nations is characterized by an intersection between (1) strong religious ideology, (2) rapid economic growth, and (3) developing educational infrastructures (Wiseman & Alromi, 2001). Consequently, schools in Gulf States provide an opportunity to examine a unique nexus of educational process, resource, and structure. As the largest and most influential nation in the Gulf region, the processes and consequences of this educational phenomenon in Saudi Arabia are particularly important for investigation. Empirical analyses of schools' institutional contexts in Saudi Arabia, therefore, provide a unique

opportunity to examine this educational phenomenon and build a foundation for further analysis of education in Gulf States.

Much of the literature relevant to schooling in Gulf States has focused either on the status of women (Abu Nasr, Khoury & Azzam, 1985; El-Sanabary, 1989; Peterson, 1989) or the penetration of Islamic principles into both curricular and administrative aspects of schooling (Shorish, 1988; Talbani, 1996). These studies paint a picture of an institutional context of Gulf State schooling characterized by a refusal to compromise traditional cultural values, but at the same time a unique and adaptive responsiveness to global isomorphism. Unfortunately, few of these studies have provided theoretical frameworks upon which further empirical analyses of education in Gulf States can develop; particularly analyses that estimate "the effects of civil society on educational outcomes" (Mazawi, 1999, p. 332; for examples see Massialas & Jarrar, 1991 and El-Sanabary, 1992).

Thus, there are two relatively underdeveloped areas of international comparative education research regarding schooling in Gulf States: (1) a foundational theoretical framework for further empirical examination of schooling in Gulf States, and (2) empirical analyses of the unique Gulf State intersection of religious ideology, rapid economic growth, and educational infrastructure (i.e., the Gulf State phenomenon). This paper addresses both of these concerns using Saudi Arabia as a Gulf State representative.

SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION AND THE SAUDI CONTEXT

During the 20th century, industrialized countries such as the United States, Japan, and Germany made large investments in human capital to expand and increase

educational quality, as well as to improve students' efficiency by implementing different curricula emphasizing school-to-work transition or vocational training.

Adam Smith (1776) asserted that, through schooling, individuals could develop their morality and acquire the skills and the abilities to become better human beings. Subsequent generations of policymakers and educators have shifted the focus of schooling to that of human capital development. The rationale behind this shift in emphasis from moral values to economic advancement was to make students more productive by making education accessible to every child (Becker, 1964, 1993; Griliches, 1996).

From a human capital perspective the more time students spend in school, the more cognitive knowledge they acquire—and the more likely they are to be employed. However, this increase in cognitive knowledge may not be enough to ensure future employment. Acquiring only cognitive knowledge or spending more years in school does not solve the problem of making the transition to the workplace, nor does it ensure individual employment because of the rapid changes in technology and information systems that have recently altered world labor markets dramatically. Instead, employers often report that they seek candidates with multiple non-vocational skills such as teamwork, basic computer, and problem solving (Committee for Economic Development, 1998; Commission on Skills of the American Workforce, 1990; Kanter & Lowe, 2000).

In response to increased unemployment, educational policymakers and planners have considered specific school-based programs to facilitate youth employment. During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the focus was on vocational education as a means to provide students with the skills needed at that time (Grubb, 1995).

To address the shortage of skilled candidates in Saudi Arabia—especially those with vocational skills—policy makers and planners established the first Saudi Arabian vocational institute in 1980. Enrollment in this vocational school, however, was not as high as expected. Moreover, enrollment in vocational education has been declining around the world (Benavot, 1983; Berryman, 1993; Levesque, Lauen, Teitelbaum, Alt, & Librera, 2000; Rifkin, 1995), and the decline in Saudi Arabia has been even more dramatic due to cultural barriers. That is, Saudi policymakers, it seems, did not take into account the population's preference for employment in the white-collar private sector. Failure to consider Saudi cultural values in implementing human capital-based educational reforms has prevented Saudi planners and policymakers from accomplishing their goals. The current situation testifies to the enormity of the problem. There are approximately 6 million non-Saudi workers in Saudi Arabia, while the estimated Saudi population is 20 million, and more than 27 percent of Saudi citizens are unemployed (Justaneeh, 1999; Saudi Arabia, 2000). Thus, while vocational training is offered in Saudi Arabia for interested students, it is not often pursued by Saudi students.

The mismatch between national development goals and educational interest in Saudi Arabia is one example of the Gulf State phenomenon. A *neo-institutional* perspective suggests that issues of educational legitimacy may be contributing to this phenomenon. From this perspective, international competition and interdependence create a common community in which all nations participate, willingly or not. In particular, the importance of inclusion in an international economy suggests the need for legitimization within a global economic community. In other words, nation-states cannot

compete with others that do not acknowledge their status within this community. A similar argument applies to social institutions as well, particularly schools.

A neo-institutionalist perspective, therefore, suggests that curricula and educational programs related to school to work transition are tools for legitimating a nation-state's inclusion in an international political, economic, and social community. The structures of school to work systems in internationally competitive nations become model scripts that other legitimacy-seeking educational systems follow. If these scripts do not match the exact character of the systems employing them, decoupling occurs. Sometimes this decoupling cannot be helped and the educational systems adopting the script know before its adoption that it cannot be completely or exactly followed. For example, decentralized systems may adopt key points from models taken from centralized systems even though the basic structure of the systems and school to work programs are fundamentally opposed. Therefore, school to work programs and curricula provide, confirm, and maintain organizational legitimacy at all levels through socially-appropriate and influential institutions such as education.

In other words, individuals, local communities, and even national systems legitimize their economic and even organizational participation and competitiveness through adoption of and appropriate adherence to confirmed legitimate models of school to work transition. Part of the legitimacy that these school to work programs impart is, however, co-opted from more traditional and established institutions such as education and schooling.

Two other aspects of school to work systems that support the argument that these programs and reforms are attempts to gain international institutional legitimacy focus on

the myth of the individual and education as a product of nation-building (Ramirez & Boli, 1987). School to work models focus on individuals' transitions from school to work as key to national economic security and competitiveness. The myth of the individual provides a framework for school to work model scripts because the source of value and change in societies emphasizing school to work reform is the individual. Likewise, the educational, economic, and, consequently, occupational influences of school to work programs and reforms contribute to the building of individuals as citizens in a nation-state. Full individual participation in and support of the state occurs when individuals become legitimate citizens with the political and economic rights and responsibilities accompanying citizenship. school to work programs afford nation-states and educational systems the opportunity to at least legitimate their attempts to incorporate individuals into the political and economic body of the nation-state. In other words, school to work programs expand and become further institutionalized as states such as Saudi Arabia vie for economic, political, and social legitimacy (regardless of their economic, political, and social status or technical output).

School to work programs become institutionalized elements of education and legitimacy efforts; therefore, the rational process for determining a need for school to work transition becomes an irrational process and part of what Meyer and Rowan (1977) attribute to "myth and ceremony." Therefore, as school to work programs and curricula expand, the significance of their outcomes (intended or actual) continues to decrease. In other words, the products of school to work programs become less important as the existence of the programs becomes more organizationally important meaning that school

to work programs, once institutionalized, will continue to expand and be maintained regardless of their actual technical output or original incentives.

Eventually, the nature of school to work becomes superfluous to the legitimizing effort and symbolic importance embodied by the program and curricula. As the persistence of school to work policy and reform and education-labor market connections suggests, the popularly hypothesized causally determinant relationship between schools and the economy carries much significance in both developing and developed nations. As a result, programs and policies that encourage and strengthen the school-industry or individual-economy relationship are important indicators of local and nationally-situated communities' economic and developmental status. Regardless of the actual output of such programs, therefore, is a need for communities to legitimize and, to a degree, prove that their inclusion in economically and developmentally restrictive groups is right and appropriate. In this manner, benefits of association can accrue to communities that may not have actually achieved the requisite level of economic or social development even though their institutions (such as education) suggest that they have by virtue of the number and activities of programs such as those dedicated to school to work transition.

The Saudi Arabian Case

Mazrui (1997, p.118) suggests that "Westerners tend to think of Islamic societies as backward-looking, oppressed by religion, and inhumanely governed," but, he continues, "measurement of the cultural distance is narrower than [Westerners] assume." Consequently, the penetration of Western culture into non-Western societies and social functions such as school to work may be uniquely implemented in Islamic Arab national

systems because of the cultural similarities more than the differences. One such Islamic Arab nation, Saudi Arabia, is a non-Western nation that is not often discussed in the literature and, although wealthy, still demonstrates some of the structural characteristics of a developing nation (Metz, 1993; Sara, 1981). In addition, Saudi Arabia provides a unique opportunity for analysis of school to work in non-Western systems because of its often open refusal to adopt certain Western characteristics. This refusal of Western influences is frequently attributed to the strong influence of the national religion of Islam on state institutions such as schooling, even though Saudi Arabia and other Islamic Arab nations are trying to blend into the global economic and political community (Al-Baadi, 1994; Massialas & Jarrar, 1987; Metz, 1993; Obeid, 1994).

As a result, "The question of what should be taught in the [Islamic Arab] school was and continues to be identified with the very essence of national existence" and in some cases has led to "a type of cultural isolation and...xenophobia" (Massialas & Jarrar, 1987, p.38). Likewise, "strong revivalist Islamization movements have recently emerged in a number of Muslim countries as a traditionalist response to modernity" (Talbani, 1996, p.66). Thus, Saudi Arabia is an interesting case because while it is rapidly modernizing it is also strongly Islamic with the cultural mores that accompany Islam and penetrate most social institutions including schools. Consequently, the penetration of Islamic Arab culture into the Saudi educational structure and curriculum, which is indirectly modeled on the Western version of mass schooling and carries with it an inherent human capital rationale, is strong (Al-Baadi, 1994; Alromi, 2000).

Yet, the Saudi resistance to Western influences is susceptible to internal cultural pressures due to prosperous economic conditions. This is the case in Saudi Arabia.

Although the Saudi state religion, Islam, encourages individuals to work productively regardless of the nature of the job and even encourages people to work in the manual occupations, previous studies have shown that Saudi graduates prefer going to college and continuing to professional occupations or working for the government in the public sector over other labor market opportunities available to high school graduates (Alogla, 1990; Alromi, 2000). Consequently, because the Saudi culture imposes a stigma on certain occupations, especially non-professional or blue-collar ones, investing in human capital through educational attainment may not be enough.

Saudi students are also highly resistant to vocational education even though the Saudi government provided vocational courses for many years before eventually establishing an official vocational education department in 1980 (Alghofaily, 1980; Al Heeti & Brock, 1997; Almegren, 1996). In fact, vocational education enrollment in Saudi Arabia dropped from about eight percent in 1975 to about four percent in 1995 (Alromi, 2000). As Kisnawi (1981, p.91) asserts, vocational education programs typically lead to low status occupations and most Saudi people prefer having "high prestige education and jobs" and will avoid those with low prestige even, in many instances, at the expense of being employed. Needless to say, this refusal of many Saudis to accept neither vocational training nor low status employment is pervasive, especially after 1975 when the oil economy became particularly lucrative. Perhaps the relatively new wealth of the Saudi population accounts for some of their ability to refuse to participate in low prestige educational and occupational opportunities. Thus, economic prosperity preceding the human capital investment of schooling coupled with their Islamic cultural heritage is part of the uniqueness of the Saudi situation regarding school to work transition.

Furthermore, Mazawi (1999, p.332) argues that educational research on Arab states "underestimates the effects of civil society on educational outcomes." One influential element of civil society that influences both education and students' transition to work is students' families. Saudi families participate in their children's transition from school to work usually through management efforts of the parents, who may influence transitions at many key points in students' academic careers even prior to graduation like many Japanese families do (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Morgan & Armer, 1992). In fact, Al Heeti and Brock (1997) point out the frequent lack of appropriate institutional guidance both in school and between school and work in Arab school systems. Therefore, many parents in Saudi Arabia must assume the guidance responsibility taken by the school institution in other countries like Japan (for example, placement counseling; LeTendre, 1996). Yet while the families in some nations are strongly tied to the school (e.g., Japan), this is not the case in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi parents' management efforts on behalf of their children are borne less out of support for the institutional relationships between schools and employers than they are from a need to socially introduce their children to the world of work and life management. In other words, Saudi parents often help their children find jobs because they think their children are socially unprepared rather than because they lack skills or because parental involvement is part of an institutionally supported arrangement. Saudi families think that students need the presence and symbolic support of an adult to get a job. The symbolism of family support in the school to work transition process is especially relevant in nations like Saudi Arabia because the patriarchal family hierarchy is a lifelong and life permeating relationship in most Islamic Arab nations. The idea of

independence from one's family is replaced by an idea of accountability. Children (of any age) often have little or no right to either contradict or refuse to follow their parents' wishes and advice because of the patriarchal structure of Islamic-influenced religion and culture.

Consequently, Saudi educators, policymakers, economists, and businessmen often suggest that offering a comprehensive curriculum is one way to ensure that all students obtain training in basic academic and labor market skills, especially since Saudi enrollment in vocational education is rapidly declining (Al-Baadi, 1994; Al Heeti & Brock, 1997). Since Saudi Arabian education is centralized in a national Ministry of Education, educators such as Al Salloom (1996) also assert that the education system needs to be more flexible. He suggests that school districts need more autonomy and authority so they can adapt programs to address their students' needs, to prepare them either for college or employment, as well as to implement changes as needed to respond to future needs.

There is no institutional link, however, between schools and employers in Saudi Arabia. Instead, the effort to link schooling with employment is influenced by Saudi Arabia's uniquely prosperous economic condition and Islamic cultural mores, such as those dictating family relationships. School to work transition emphases, therefore, are more individualistic and oriented toward skill acquisition. And, although Saudis as Islamic Arabs often consciously reject Western influences, the nature of Saudi school to work transition suggests the predominance of Western human capital rationale in school to work transition investment and implementation decisions among Saudi students and families in accordance with Saudi culture rather than against it.

DATA, METHODS, AND RESULTS

The target population for this study consisted of all senior general high school students (N=129,851) under the direction of the Saudi Ministry of Education situated in the city of Riyadh. The Riyadh school district is divided into five sub-districts: the middle, north, south, east, and west regions. The sample size of this study was 535 out of 129,851 students (4 percent). Of the 535 students in the sample, 524 (97.9 percent) returned the questionnaire. This randomly selected multi-stage sample was taken from a stratified population because the population in each sub-district has different characteristics. For example, the residents of the north of Riyadh are considered to be wealthier than those in the other regions.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first and second sections inquired about the students' and their parents' background. The third section elicited the students' perceptions concerning their general high school education system, in general, and school's curriculum, in particular, in terms of preparing them for the labor market. The students were asked to rate their attitudes regarding their general high school education using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," and indicate how completely they felt that their general high school courses (Islamic religion, Arabic language, Science, Math, English, Computer Science, and Library and research courses) developed their abilities or provided skills they felt they would need in the job market (e.g., teamwork, leadership, problem solving, computer literacy, creativity, and flexibility). The respondents were also asked to rank each course on a five-point Likert scale, where "1" meant did not provide any skills, "2" meant

provided little skills, "3" meant provided a moderate amount of skills, "4" meant provided a good deal of skills, and "5" meant provided very good skills. To determine the students' and their parent's demographic information, the students were also asked several questions including their age, their plans after graduation, and their parents' SES.

Using this data, we first calculated descriptive statistics for the indicators of students' perceptions about how the Saudi general high school education system prepares them for post-secondary work and careers. Table 1 shows that only 22.6% of the students agree that the general high school curriculum prepares them to work in the labor market, whereas 70.7% agree that the general high school student should have some training before graduation to help them succeed in the job market.

[Table 1]

Table 2 shows the results of the descriptive analyses of students' perceptions about which courses provide which employable skills. Students reported that Islamic Religion courses provided the most skills on average (3.44 out of 5.00), whereas Library and Research courses provide the least (2.30 out of 5.00). Students also reported that of the employable skills provided by courses, teamwork was the most common (3.08 out of 5.00) and Computer Literacy the least common (2.51 out of 5.00). Interestingly, even though Computer Literacy was the least common skill taught, Computer courses were perceived by students as providing a lot of employable skills (second only to Islamic Religion courses).

[Table 2]

Figure 1 provides excerpts from Saudi job applications provided by personnel and human resources managers in Riyadh. These excerpts give the responses of four applicants to questions asking which job they are applying for, their years of experience, their preferred start date, and other jobs they might be able to do. Applicants 1 and 2 said they would do whatever job was available, whereas Applicant 3 left this answer blank. Only Applicant 4 named the job he was applying for (writer, deliveryman), but also indicated that he was willing to do whatever job was available. Of the four applicants two indicated that they have no job experience and one left this answer blank. Applicant 4 said he has two months of company experience. When asked what other jobs they can do, the applicants that answered this question said that they can do anything that the employer would like for them to do, but did not specify any jobs. These answers indicate that the applicants are not prepared for the job market and have no skills to offer their employers. While they are certainly willing to work, the employer is left with little more than motivation when hiring.

[Figure 1]

Given the evidence reported so far, it becomes apparent that there is quite a bit of variation in the types of skills incorporated into the general high school curriculum and in the types of courses through which these skills are transmitted. Most of the information about post-secondary opportunities, be they work or education related, does not come

through the formal curriculum or through the services and programs provided in high schools in Riyadh. Table 3.1 shows the bivariate frequencies and percentages for Saudi students' post high school expectations by their perception of whether or not their high school provides information about post-high school opportunities. Of the students indicating that they will continue their education in university, 82% reported that they were either not sure or felt that their high school did not provide information about post-high school opportunities. Likewise, 78% or government career bound students and 80% of labor market bound students reported that either they were not sure or felt that their high school did not provide information about post-high school opportunities. In addition, Table 3.2 shows that there is no significant difference in students' post-high school expectations based on whether a student reports that their high school provides information about post-high school opportunities or not (F=.461, p=n.s.).

[Table 3.1]

[Table 3.2]

Given that students report that their high school does not provide any information about post-high school opportunities and that this perception does not significantly vary between groups based on their post-high school expectations, we look at how students' post-high school expectations vary by who they get their information about post-high school opportunities from. Table 4.1 shows the bivariate frequencies and percentages for Saudi students' post high school expectations by their reported source of information about post-high school opportunities. Most university-bound students reported that their

parents (30%) and the newspaper (31%) were their primary source of information about post-high school opportunities. Government career-bound students reported that their sources of information were most frequently their friends (36%) and the newspaper (32%), and labor market-bound students most frequently got their information from their friends (38%). Of the students reporting, only 3% of university-bound students, 2% of government career-bound students, and none of the labor market-bound students reported that school was a source of information about post-high school opportunities. Table 4.2 shows that there is no significant difference in Saudi students' post-high school expectations based on their reported source of information about post-high school opportunities, which indicates that indeed most students looked to parents, friends, or newspaper ads for information rather than their schools.

[Table 4.1]

[Table 4.2]

The results of our analyses to this point indicate that there are large discrepancies about what schools and the national educational plan to prepare students for their future careers and economic productivity are targeting and what students report are the most influential factors for their post-high school careers. What then does impact Saudi students' post-high school expectations if not schools?

Table 5 presents the results of our regression analysis. Each column represents a different model. In the first column are the coefficients for the predictors of a student reporting that he will enter the labor market upon graduation. The significant predictors

($p<.05$) of students going to the labor market upon graduation are parents expectations for continuing education (b=-.128), courses develop computer literacy (b=.044), and courses develop creativity (b=-.054). The second column presents the coefficients for students reporting that they will go to university following high school graduation. The significant predictors of students continuing their education at university are parents expectations for continuing education (b=.647) and courses develop creativity (b=.087). The third column presents the results for students reporting that they will pursue a government career after graduation. The significant predictors of students pursuing careers in government are parents expectations for continuing education (b=-.519) and courses develop problem solving (b=.105).

[Table 5]

These results suggest that there is indeed a mismatch between the national development goals in Saudi Arabia and the perceptions and expectations of Saudi high school students related to school to work transition.

DISCUSSION

Although certainly not purposefully, human capital reasoning and perspectives dominate the research on and development of school to work transition programs as well as policy recommending these programs. In particular, human capital arguments connect educational input to economic output while referring to system-wide benefit for justification. These accounts of school to work transition often relate education to

training in terms of economic performance, productivity, growth, or income (Okano, 1993). Two popularly generalized dilemmas are: 1) graduates cannot find the work they desire or 2) employers cannot find qualified graduates to employ (Lyall, 1997). In particular, school to work transition policy and program reports in Saudi Arabia as elsewhere identify three potential causes of these school to work transition dilemmas: 1) a decline in youth's employable skill training, 2) constantly changing technology, and 3) new work organization needs (Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 1990; Department of Education, 1994; Hamilton, 1990; Stern, Bailey, & Merritt, 1996; Stern, Raby, & Dayton, 1992). From a human capital perspective, therefore, as society becomes more complex, individuals entering the labor market should be more highly trained and skilled.

The Institutionalization of School to Work Transition in Saudi Arabia

McFarland and Vickers (1994) report that in spite of differences in educational structure and governance, most OECD countries are bringing vocational education courses and curricula together with general education. This is the case in Saudi Arabia as well. Thus as vocational education as an independent educational track is fading, general education is absorbing and incorporating it. Given this phenomenon, the global trend of adopting curricula and programs for guiding and aiding students' transition to work is not surprising. International competition as well as dependence creates a community in which all nations participate. The importance of inclusion in a global economy suggests the need for legitimization within a global economic community. In other words, Saudi Arabia as a nation-state cannot compete with others that do not acknowledge its status

within this community. The same argument applies to social institutions in Saudi Arabia as well, particularly schools.

As participation in an international community becomes increasingly important for individual nations, policies oriented toward ensuring a standardized and qualified labor force become more frequent. Consequently, model school to work transition systems may arise independent of empirical research warranting promotion of these models. The persistence of these archetypal school to work transition systems in spite of reliable empirical evidence that they produce more employable individuals suggests that a system of institutional legitimacy dominates the school to work transition process. From a neo-institutionalist perspective, therefore, school to work transition is another tool for legitimating a nation-state's inclusion in international political, economic, and educational communities. The structure of model systems becomes scripted and other educational systems seeking legitimacy follow these model scripts for school to career transition.

Two other aspects of school to work transition that support an argument that relevant school to work policies and curricula in Saudi Arabia are attempts to gain international legitimacy focus on the myth of the individual and school to work transition as a product of nation-building. School to work transition models and policies relying on them focus on individuals' transitions from school to career as key to national economic security and competitiveness. Following Ramirez and Boli's (1987) argument, the myth of the individual may provide a framework for school to work transition models because the fundamental sources of importance and change in societies valuing school to work transition policies and reform initiatives are individuals. Likewise, educational,

economic, and, consequently, occupational influences of school to work transition policies and reform contribute to the building of individuals as citizens in the Saudi Arabian nation-state. Full individual participation in and support of the state occurs when individuals become legitimate citizens with the political and economic rights, responsibilities, and rewards that accompany this citizenship. School to work transition policies based on these model systems afford state and educational systems the opportunity to at least legitimate their attempts to incorporate individuals into the political and economic body of the nation-state.

Consequently, modernization theorists are right in that "economic development is associated with major changes in prevailing values and beliefs" (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p.50). And to a certain degree human capital rationales are right to suggest that school to work programs impart skills, which go beyond the strictly technical-functional outcomes of work and employment as benefits to individuals. Benefits at the system or national level are then possible, but not necessarily predicted. In other words, students acquire skills that may increase the value of their esoteric qualities as much as those specifically related to their occupation and continued employment.

In spite of this, however, Saudi students do not necessarily acquire skills giving them increased value and bargaining power, which could help them when searching for employment. Instead, Saudi high school curricula and services may bring no or even negative bargaining benefits to job-seeking graduates. In contrast to this is the evidence suggesting that individuals' marketable value and potential income are proportionally dependent upon the degree to which their skills match employers' needs, although the nature of those skills varies by post-high school expectations. The important finding is

that in some nations the skills do not have to be vocationally specific, whereas in Saudi Arabia it is better if they are.

Most importantly, the Saudi Arabian context for school to work transition, as seen in the significant influences of parents and friends regarding students' post-high school career choices, is the dominant factor in school to work transition. In explaining the creation and growth of the modern nation-state, Anderson (1996, p.12) proposes that "nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being." We have argued here that a similar case may be made for the creation and growth of official school to work transition programs and curricula in Saudi Arabia because, to adopt Anderson's (1996) phrasing, *modern schooling for future employment* has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held *institutional or economic* ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being. Our analysis of school to work transition in Saudi Arabia has been an attempt to do that without forming "broad assumptions about the influence of culture" nor "paying cursory attention to the cultural contexts of learning" (Bempechat & Drago-Severson, 1999, p.287).

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Table 1. Students' Perceptions about the Saudi General High School Education System (N=524).

Statement	Students' Perceptions (in percentages)				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
The general high school curriculum prepares students to work in the labor market.	6.9	15.7	26.5	28.3	22.6
The general high school provides information to students about opportunities in the job market.	6.1	13.2	30.1	32.7	17.9
The teachers provide information about the job market.	7.5	16.1	31.7	29.2	15.5
The student advisors provide information about the job market.	9.3	17.3	26.2	31.1	16.1
The general high school provides some trips to visit businesses.	16.4	31.2	12.4	26.8	13.2
The general high school student should have some training before graduation to help them succeed in the job market.	43.1	27.6	7	13.5	8.7

Table 2. Student Perceptions about Courses Providing Employable Skills (1=Did Not Provide Any Skills; 5=Provided Very Good Skills).

	Employable Skills						
Courses	Teamwork	Problem Solving	Flexibility	Creativity	Leadership	Computer Literacy	Overall Skills
Islamic Religion	4.10	4.05	3.70	3.05	3.37	2.21	3.44
Computer	3.05	2.91	2.81	3.12	2.64	3.34	2.96
English	2.90	3.00	2.81	2.72	2.59	2.75	2.80
Science	3.03	2.61	2.72	2.94	2.56	2.39	2.72
Arabic Language	2.83	3.02	2.84	2.85	2.50	2.28	2.71
Mathematics	2.80	2.50	2.52	2.86	2.38	2.68	2.62
Library/Research	2.52	2.32	2.34	2.30	2.17	2.14	2.30
Overall Mean	3.08	2.96	2.85	2.84	2.61	2.51	

Figure 1. Saudi Job Application Excerpts.

Applicant #1	
What is the name of the job you want:	Whatever.
Years of experience:	I have nothing.
When you can start:	Any time any day.
Other jobs you can do:	I can do whatever you want me to do.

Applicant #2	
What is the name of the job you want:	Whatever.
Years of experience:	I have nothing.
When you can start:	Any time.
Other jobs you can do:	I can do any job you want me to do.

Applicant #3	
What is the name of the job you want:	*[Left blank.]*
Years of experience:	*[Left blank.]*
When you can start:	*[Left blank.]*
Other jobs you can do:	*[Left blank.]*

Applicant #4	
What is the name of the job you want:	[Pursuer], writer, deliveryman, or whatever.
Years of experience:	I have two months working in company.
When you can start:	4.10.2000
Other jobs you can do:	I can do whatever you want me to do even if it is outside the city of Riyadh.

Table 3.1. High School Information about Post-High School Opportunities by Saudi Students' Post-High School Expectations (in frequencies).

High School Provides Information about Post-High School Opportunities	Saudi Students' Post-High School Expectations					
	University		Government		Labor Market	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Strongly Agree	20	6	8	6	2	4
Agree	39	12	19	15	7	15
Not Sure	106	32	33	26	13	28
Disagree	106	32	41	32	17	37
Strongly Disagree	58	18	26	20	7	15

Table 3.2. Analysis of Variance of High School Information about Post-High School Opportunities on Saudi Students' Post-High School Expectations.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Sum of Squares	F	p
Between Groups	0.80	4	0.199	0.461	n.s.
Within Groups	214.66	497	0.432		
Total	215.46	501			

Table 4.1. Source of Information about Post-High School Opportunities by Saudi Students' Post-High School Expectations (in frequencies).

Source of Information about Post-High School Opportunities	Saudi Students' Post-High School Expectations					
	University		Government		Labor Market	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
School	9	3	2	2	0	0
Parents	88	30	19	18	12	27
Friends	73	25	39	36	17	38
Newspaper	91	31	34	32	14	31
Other	31	11	13	12	2	4

Table 4.2. Analysis of Variance of Source of Information about Post-High School

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Sum of Squares	F	p
Between Groups	3.74	4	0.935	2.096	n.s.
Within Groups	195.85	439	0.446		
Total	199.59	443			

Table 5. Predictors of Saudi Students' Post-High School Expectations.

	Saudi Students' Post-HS Expectations		
Predictor Variables	Labor Market	University	Government
HS provides job market information	0.010	-0.008	-0.002
Parents expect continue education after HS	-0.128 *	0.647 *	-0.519 *
Regional SES	-0.017	0.050	-0.032
Courses Develop Teamwork	-0.016	-0.021	0.037
Courses Develop Leadership	0.009	0.016	-0.025
Courses Develop Problem Solving	-0.043	-0.062	0.105 *
Courses Develop Computer Literacy	0.044 *	-0.038	-0.006
Courses Develop Creativity	-0.054 *	0.087 *	-0.032
Courses Develop Flexibility	0.052	-0.006	-0.046

*p<.05

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