

# Teaching students from KSA

# History

- 75 years ago, KSA did not exist, yet is now the 13<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world – declared a unified kingdom in 1932.
- It is estimated that 80% of the labour force in KSA is non-national.
- Until the 1960s, most of the population was nomadic or semi-nomadic, however, now more than 95% of the population is settled.
- Basic law adopted in 1992 declared KSA a monarchy ruled by the sons and grandsons of King Abdul Aziz Al Saud and that the Holy Qur'an is the constitution of the country which is governed on the basis of Islamic law (Shari'a).



# Economy

- Oil discovered in 1930s, but large scale production did not begin until after WW2.
- Sharp rise in petroleum revenues in 1974 following the 1973 Arab-Israeli war meant KSA became one of the fastest growing economies in the world.
- But higher oil prices led to development of more oil fields around the world resulting in a worldwide oil glut in the mid-1980s.
- This led to uncertainty in KSA and as a result the government set up 5-year plans to allocate its petroleum income to transform its relatively undeveloped, oil-based economy into that of a modern industrial state.

# Growth

- Key factor holding back growth in KSA has been the mismatch between the job skills of Saudi graduates and the needs of the private job market.
- Since the 5<sup>th</sup> plan (1990-1995), the government has sought to reduce dependence on foreign workers, and from 6<sup>th</sup> plan (1996-2000) the government has turned its focus to the education of Saudi nationals and the Saudization of the workforce.
- Current policy is that 50% of any workforce must be Saudi nationals.
- Youth unemployment stands officially at 23.6%, unofficial estimates place it as high as 35% among men in their early 20s with high-school diplomas.

- The median age for males is 26.4 years, for comparison in NZ it is 36.2 years, so KSA has a very young population with very high unemployment.
- In the past, many Saudi nationals found work with the government, but the kingdom has one of the region's highest population growth rates so citizens no longer automatically get such (cushy and well paid) jobs.
- This generation is not prepared to take any job for the same salary as a foreign worker, so the government needs to create better-skilled employable Saudi nationals, which involves reforming the entire education system, restructuring the labour market and encouraging a cultural shift in terms of attitudes towards work and education, i.e. what it is appropriate for Saudi children to learn.



# Education system

- Relies primarily on rote learning of the Qur'an and Arabic studies.
- In the 2007 “Trends in International Mathematics and Science” study produced by the US National Centre for Education Statistics, eight grade Saudi school children ranked 5<sup>th</sup> from the bottom of 48 countries surveyed.
- In UNESCO’s 2008 index for assessing quality of education it ranked 93<sup>rd</sup> out of 129.
- While education outcomes are set by the Ministry of Education, schools administer their own exams. The mind-set is that all students should be passing or the teacher is not doing a good job.

- Education reform is fraught, as education is traditionally one of the main areas in which the Wahhabi clerics have influence. These clerics helped found the kingdom in 1932 and dominate vast parts of society.
- The 5 year development plans have therefore focused on post secondary education.
- English Language education emphasises the oral approach at the behest of the Ministry of Education.
- Not uncommon for urbanised Saudi nationals to be using oral English in their day-to-day life since there are so many foreign workers in KSA.

# Culture

- Culturally homogenous, reflected in the common Arabic language and adherence to Sunni Wahhabi Islam.
- Also rests in the diffusion of values and attitudes exemplified in the family and in Arabian tribal society, in particular the values and attitudes regarding relations within the family and relations between the family and the rest of society.
- Family is therefore the primary basis for identity and status for the individual and the immediate focus of loyalty.
- Families share a sense of corporate identity and the esteem of the family is measured by an individual's capacity to live up to socially prescribed ideals of honour.



- High degree of social stratification where tribal identities are paramount.
- In contemporary KSA the social strata are becoming blurred, and new status categories based on education and economic advantage are becoming important.
- Strong, rich oral story-telling tradition and a highly developed sense of irony.
- A deeply honourable culture.
- Hospitality is hallowed – all men are equal under God and should be able to come before their leader and seek their counsel. Within KSA, CEOs will maintain an open door policy, and the King holds regular audiences where anyone may wander in to chat and will be received hospitably.

# Cross-cultural communication

Generalisations,  
extrapolations and  
observations

# Working with students from KSA

- He who negotiates best, wins. Power relations as we know them do not exist.
- Emotions become quickly heated if a student perceives unfairness of any form.
- The combination of a rich story-telling culture and a negotiating culture can lead to a sense of chaos, disorganisation and frustration, and going round in circles.
- Great speaking skills do not equal great listening skills.

# Weaknesses

- Family honour is the greatest pressure on our students, but is still an extrinsic motivator rather than an intrinsic one – lack of intrinsic motivation.
- Poor study skills and time management.
- Reluctance to study outside the classroom (lack of understanding of the work involved).
- Lack of transfer of skills.
- Undeveloped academic thinking and a lack of a questioning mind.
- Poor writing skills in comparison to speaking.
- Often poor reading and writing skills in Arabic as well.
- General reluctance to gather information from the written word.

# Strengths

- Great support networks
- Great respect for others
- Dynamic in the classroom
- Orally very competent
- Great use of metaphor
- Well-developed sense of irony
- Very social
- Transparent honesty.

# Student management

- Clear boundaries and rules so that negotiation is kept to a minimum.
- No deviation from any set processes as this can leave you wide open for negotiation.
- ‘This is not a discussion, this is information’.
- Build in time delays to diffuse heated emotions.
- Build in clear chains of command to avoid students going straight to the top with a minor issue.
- Build in checks and measures so you aren’t left with any surprises.
- Get students to repeat back instructions or decisions made.

# Scaffolding personal responsibility

- Make explicit that personal responsibility is part of your programme and outline what it means for your classroom.
- Set clear expectations in small achievable steps.
- Clearly outline the aims of each class/task and what is required for homework (homework diaries, classroom journal).
- Use charts and measurement tables to indicate progress made.
- Give clear feedback to the individual on how they need to improve their score for the next time.
- Clearly articulate what extension/remedial work needs doing.
- Give praise and rewards for work done well, even if that is for handing in the homework on time, not doing it well.
- Utilize former students.

# In the classroom

- Concept checking, repetition, getting students to record information themselves.
- Constantly referring to skills learnt in previous levels and linking related activities.
- For orally competent students, getting them to speak and record their written assignments and to then transcribe them – work with what they can do.
- Capitalise on strengths – group writing activities, group dictations, group listening activities, sharing knowledge, teaching each other.
- Praise and improve strong oral skills, don't ignore them.
- Build in an extensive reading programme.



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# References

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