

CHAPTER ONE: THE SAUDI ARABIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

General Overview

Until the late nineteenth century, education in all parts of what is now Saudi Arabia was traditional, restricted to reading, writing and recitation of the Qur'an. Higher education in religious studies existed in the main cities. The beginning of what one may call "modern education" took place towards the end of the nineteenth century in the then Ottoman provinces of Hijaz and al-Ahsa. In the 1920s a few private schools began offering non-religious subjects in some of the larger towns. But it was not until the 1930s that State-sponsored modern education began. A network of secondary schools was set up beginning in 1951. In 1954 the Ministry of Education was established and Prince Fahd Bin Abd al-Aziz, today's monarch, became the first minister. In 1957, the first not wholly religious university was opened. Public education for girls began in 1964, in spite of strong opposition on the part of conservative circles. In 1975, the Ministry of Higher Education was established. The development plans of the 1970s and 1980s improved the education system considerably.

The literacy rate in Saudi Arabia in 1970 was 15% for men and 2% for women. By 1990 it was 73% for men and 48% for women, and, in 2002 it reached 90.9% and 70.2%, respectively. According to the Central Intelligence Agency's World Factbook 2002, the literacy rate in 2002 was estimated at 84.2% for males and 69.5% for females.³ Whatever the exact figures, it is clear that the Saudi government has made an outstanding effort to universalize education, and that effort can be clearly seen even today, in the budget figures of the last three years, as given by Saudi sources:

Year 2000: US\$13.17 billion, 25% of the total budget for that year.

Year 2001: US\$14.21 billion, 25% of the total budget for that year .⁴

Year 2002: US\$14.48 billion, 27% of the total budget for this year .⁵

Education in Saudi Arabia is not compulsory, but it is free to all, textbooks and health services for students included. Hence, the spread of education is dependent on availability of schools in the various regions, rather than on other factors. It seems that the government is working intensively to improve this and increase the enrollment rate. According to some data, in 1960, 22% of boys and 2% of girls were enrolled in schools. In 1981 the rates stood at 81% and 43%, respectively. In 1989 the number of girls enrolled in the public school system was close to the number of boys: 1.2 million girls as against 1.4 million boys.⁶ It is said that today, the number of female students exceeds that of male students in both schools and universities.⁷

In the school year of 2001/2 there were close to 28,000 public schools in Saudi Arabia, in addition to 214 colleges and other educational and training institutions.⁸ Of these, 16,600 schools and 73 colleges were for girls.⁹ There were 1.19 million male students and 1.64 million female students in these

¹ Saudi Arabia had 45 million boys and 40 million girls. Federal Research Division/Country Studies, p. 1.

² "Educating Young Saudis to Contribute to the Nation's Future", in Saudi Arabia Embassy Publications - Spring 2002 Magazine: Education, p. 9.

³ CIA, World Factbook 2002: Saudi Arabia - Population, p.1.

⁴ "Saudi Government education and manpower training budget for 2001 to reach US\$ 14.21 billion" in: Saudi Arabia Business Press Releases, Year 2001 Press Releases (1st April 2001).

⁵ "Educating...", pp. 3-4.

⁶ "Saudi Arabia: Education", Library of Congress/Federal Research Division/Country Studies.

⁷ "Educating...", p. 4.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 3, 7, respectively.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 6, 7, respectively

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 6. With an additional number of approximately 500,000 students in universities and colleges in 2001/2 (Ibid..." p. 7) the total number of Saudi students that year in all institutions of education was close to 5 million ("Educating...", p.

However, a closer look at the detailed figures given by the same source discloses a discrepancy between the total figure and the breakdown and also raises questions regarding the accuracy of at least one figure (shown in bold, with question marks):

Level	Schools		Students*		Teachers*	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Elementary	6,209	6,000	200?	1,000	90	100
Intermediate	3,388	2,700	590	500	43	44
Secondary	1,719	1,500	400	365	25	30
Total	11,316	16,600?	1,190	1,640?	158	174

*In Thousands ¹¹

In addition, these figures do not support another statement by the same Saudi source, namely, that the current student-teacher ratio in Saudi Arabia is 12.5 students to every teacher ¹².

¹³ Structure

The Saudi Arabian educational system is complex. Until recently, there were five parallel systems, apart from private and international schools in the Kingdom, as well as the Saudi schools of various levels abroad. The Ministry of Education, however, is responsible for boys' education all over the country at most levels: elementary and intermediate general education, as well as secondary general and vocational education (the latter being divided into technical, commercial and agricultural schools). In addition, the Ministry is responsible for adult education, both in the field of eradicating illiteracy and in providing continuing education. The numerous junior colleges, male-teacher colleges and post-secondary technical schools also belong to the Ministry of Education, which supervises all private schools in the country as well. Private schools exist mainly in the larger cities. They basically teach the same curriculum and use the same books that are used in the public sector.

The Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for seven of the eight universities in the Kingdom (the eighth one being under the authority of the Higher Education Council of Ministers). They are as follows:

- The Umm al-Qura University in Mecca
- The Islamic University in Medina
- The Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh
- The King Sa'ud University in Riyadh
- The King Abd al-Aziz University in Jeddah
- The King Faisal University in Dhahran
- The King Khaled University in Abha
- The King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran

The Ministry also supervises the colleges of higher education. It should be noted that the overall policy of higher education in Saudi Arabia is usually determined by the Higher Education Council of Ministers - presided over by the Prime Minister (who has traditionally been the King himself).

Until recently girls' education was a separate endeavor, under the General Presidency of Girls' Education. It was always linked to the Ministry of Education since the curriculum was the same. In

3) out of a population of a little more than 23.5 million with a growth rate of 3.27% (both being 2002 estimates by the CIA - see CIA, World Factbook 2002, p.1).

¹¹ The table is based on the information given in "Educating...", p. 6.

¹² Ibid, p. 5.

¹³ The material in this subchapter is based on several sources:

Robert Sedgwick, "Education in Saudi Arabia", World Education News and Reviews (WENR), Vol. 14, Issue 6 (Nov./Dec. 2001) pp. 1-2; UNESCO, "Saudi Arabia - Education System", pp. 1-3; "General Education", in Saudi Arabia - Profile - Education, p. 1, as well as on bits of information taken from other sources.

March 2002, the General Presidency was fully merged into the Ministry of Education. Within the Ministry, the General Presidency is also responsible for girls' junior colleges, for female-teacher colleges throughout the Kingdom, and for nurseries and kindergartens where children of both sexes are taught together. Women's literacy programs also fall under its supervision. It should be noted that female students are educated in separate branches of Saudi universities.

A distinct system is responsible for religious education of the secondary and post-secondary levels, supervised by the two Islamic universities. Its main goal is to provide the State with generations of clerics in the various religious disciplines.

Finally, there are military schools and academies of the various defense forces where youngsters are trained. These schools belong to the Ministry of Defense or to the National Guard, which is a separate force, independent of the Saudi armed forces.

Saudi Schools Abroad

These are part of a system designed for Saudis abroad, but also - if not chiefly - for non-Saudi Muslim students. In 2002 there were 18 such academies and schools at various levels with over 5,000 students and more than 600 teachers under the supervision of the Directorate-General of Saudi Schools Abroad, within the Ministry of Education. These schools are located in Austria, Great Britain, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Russia, Turkey, the USA, and in some Muslim countries such as Morocco, Indonesia, Malaysia and Djibuti¹⁴. Beyond this system of Saudi education abroad, there is much involvement on the part of the Saudi government in sponsoring Islamic education in a large number of countries, in the West and elsewhere, through special foundations.

Levels¹⁵

There are five levels of education in Saudi Arabia:

1. Pre-school level (nurseries and kindergartens) which is limited in its scope and exists in the cities and the larger towns only.
2. Elementary level - six grades for ages 6-12 of both sexes (separately).
3. Intermediate level - three grades for ages 12-15 of both sexes (separately).
4. Secondary level - three grades for ages 15-18. It includes general education - for both sexes (separately), vocational (technical, commercial, agricultural) education and religious education - all being for males only.
5. Post-secondary and university level: eight universities - for males but with separate branches for females, separate male and female colleges, separate male and female teacher training colleges, an institute of public administration - for males but with a branch for females, higher technical institutes and higher institutions for financial and commercial sciences.

Curriculum¹⁶

Public education at all levels is never separate from its Islamic roots. Religion is studied at all levels alongside the other subjects. It is usually divided into five subjects: Qur'an recitation [tajwid], Qur'an commentary [tafsir], Prophetic sayings [Hadith], Islamic jurisprudence [fiqh], and "monotheism", i.e., Wahhabi doctrine [Tawhid - which is the abbreviated title of a book by the founder of

Wahhabism, Sheikh Muhammad Bin Abd al-Wahhab (18th century)]. Since the 1930s, non-religious

¹⁴ "Academies abroad cater to educational needs of students", The Saudi Arabian Information Resource (Riyadh, 5th February 2002) p. 1; "General Education", p. 1; "Educating...", p. 6.

¹⁵ The material in this subchapter is based on several sources:

Sedgwick, pp. 1-8; UNESCO, pp. 1-3; "Primary and Secondary School Education", The Saudi Arabian Information Resource, p.1; "Educating...", p. 5, and other, lesser, sources.

¹⁶ The material in this subchapter is based mainly on Sedgwick, pp. 2-3, as well as on the examination of the textbooks available at CMIP.

subjects have been gradually introduced and they now form the bulk of the curriculum. Yet, even within a geography or a science textbook, one can find remarks of a religious nature.

Following are the curricula of the various levels of education in Saudi Arabia:

Elementary education: Arabic, art education, geography, history, home economics (for girls), mathematics, physical education (for boys), religious studies, national education and science. A recent attempt to introduce the teaching of English at this level, beginning in the fourth grade, was foiled by the clerics, and the outcome is not yet apparent.

Intermediate education: Arabic, art education, English, geography, history, home economics (for girls), mathematics, physical education (for boys), religious studies, national education and science.

General secondary education: During the first year students share a common curriculum. In the final two years they are divided into scientific and literary streams. Students scoring 60% in all first year subjects may choose between the two streams. Those who score under 60% must opt for the literary stream. First year general curriculum includes: Arabic, biology, chemistry, English, geography, history, home economics (for girls), mathematics, physical education (for boys), computer sciences and religious studies.

Religious secondary education: Arabic language and literature, English, general culture, geography, history, religious studies. Religious education basically uses the same curriculum as the general education system but the emphasis on religious studies is much stronger.

Vocational-technical secondary education: Arabic, chemistry, English, mathematics, physical education, physics, religious studies, architectural drawing, auto mechanics, electricity, machine mechanics, metal mechanics, radio and television.

Vocational-commercial education: Arabic, English, mathematics, geography, religious studies, management and secretarial studies, bookkeeping and accounting, commercial correspondence, economics, financial mathematics.

Vocational-agricultural education: Arabic, English, religious studies, agricultural economics, agronomy, animal husbandry, applied biology, applied chemistry, applied mathematics, applied physics, farm management, horticulture, marketing, plant nutrition.

Institutions of higher education provide the students with a variety of curricula, alongside a variable degree of religious studies. Saudi universities offer, among other doctorates, a doctoral degree in propagation of Islam [da'wah], namely, Islamic missionary work¹⁷. English, rather than Arabic, is the language of instruction at the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran.

¹⁷ Sedgwick, p. 5.

Education Policy

The Saudi official policy of education is laid out in an 18-page document with 236 clauses. Beyond the universally accepted ideas of developing the student's abilities for his own and for his society's benefit, etc., there is a strong emphasis on the Islamic nature of Saudi education. Following are translated excerpts to illustrate this approach and other points of interest ¹⁸

سياسة التعليم

سياسة التعليم

تمهيد

الباب الأول: الأسس العامة التي يقوم عليها التعليم

الباب الثاني: غاية التعليم وأهدافه العامة

الباب الثالث: أهداف مراحل التعليم

الباب الرابع: التخطيط لمراحل التعليم

الباب الخامس: أحكام خاصة

الباب السادس: وسائل التربية والتعليم

الباب السابع: نشر العلم

الباب الثامن: تمويل التعليم

الباب التاسع: أحكام عامة

تمهيد

الحمد لله رب العالمين والسلامة والسلام على خاتم الأنبياء والمرسلين سيدنا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين وبعد
فإن :

1- السياسة التعليمية هي الخطوط العامة التي تقوم عليها عملية التربية والتعليم أداء للتوجب في تعريف الفرد بر به
وديله وإقامة سلوكه على شرعه وتلبية لِمَاجَات المجتمع وتحقيقاً لأهداف الأمة وهي تشمل حقول التعليم ومراحلها
المستقلة ، والنمط والمناهج والوسائل التربوية والنظم الإدارية والأجهزة القائمة على التعليم وسائر ما يتصل به .
والسياسة التعليمية في المملكة العربية السعودية تنبثق من الإسلام الذي تدن به الأمة عقيدة وحياداً وخلقاً وشرعية
وحكماً ونظماً متكاملات للحياة ، وهي جزء أساسي من السياسة العامة للدولة وفق للتخطيط المتكامل فيما يلي:

الباب الأول: الأسس العامة التي يقوم عليها التعليم

2- الإيمان بالله ربنا وبالإسلام ديننا وبمحمد صلى الله عليه وسلم نبياً ورسولاً .

3- التصور الإسلامي الكامل للكون والإنسان والحياة وأن الوجود كله خاضع لما منه الله تعالى، يقوم كل مخلوق
بوظائفه دون خلل أو اضطراب.

4- الحياة الدنيا مرحلة إنتاج وعمل، يستثمر فيها المسلم مطلقته عن إيمان وهدى للحياة الأبدية الخالدة في ا ندار
الأخرة، فالقوم صل ولا حساب، وغداً حساب ولا صل.

5- الرسالة المحمدية هي المنهج الأقوم للحياة الفاضلة التي تحقق السعادة لبني الإنسان، وتتفاد البشرية سماً تردت فيه
من فساد وشقاء.

6- المثل العليا التي جاء بها الإسلام لِيُأْمِرَ بِحَسَنَاتِهِ وينهى عن سيئاته بناءً تهدي برسالة محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم،
لتحقيق العزة في الدنيا، والسعادة في ندار الأخرة.

7- الإيمان بالكرامة الإنسانية التي قررها القرآن الكريم وأدوات بها لتقيام بأمانة الله في الأرض (وَأَقْرَبُ كَرَمًا بَيْنَ عَالَمٍ
وَحَسْبَانِي فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرِزْقَانِي مِّنَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَمَا كُنَّا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبَنَا إِلَىٰ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عِندَ عَرْشِ جَدِّهِ الَّذِي فِي يَمِينِهِ خِزْيَانَةُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ) . سورة الإسراء

http://www.scfep.gov.sa/Edu_Policy.htm 21/10/2002

¹⁸ "Siyasat al-Ta'lim [Education Policy]" pp. 1-18.

Preface: ... The educational policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia emanates from Islam, which is followed by the nation as a faith, [way of] worship, morality, law, government and an integral way of life. It is a fundamental part of the general policy of the State, according to the following detailed planning.

Chapter One: General Foundations on which Education is Based

2. Believing in God as the Lord, in Islam as the religion, and in Muhammad as the Prophet and Messenger.
5. The Muhammedan mission is the straightest course for virtuous life, which will bring happiness for mankind and save humanity from the corruption and misery it has deteriorated into.
9. Establishing the girl's right to an education which will suit her innate nature and prepare her for her mission in life, provided that it is done modestly and respectably and according to Islamic Law [Shari'ah], as women are the siblings of men.
11. The religious sciences are fundamental in all the years of elementary, intermediate and [all] branches of secondary education. Islamic culture is a basic subject in all the years of higher education.
12. Giving to the various sciences and education[al subjects], and to the material thereof, an Islamic orientation within the curriculum, as well as in [textbook] writing and in teaching. Dealing with their problems, weighing their theories and ways of making use of them in a manner that derives them from Islam and makes them agree with the correct Islamic thought.
13. Benefiting from all kinds of useful human knowledge in the light of Islam...
17. Full faith in the fundamental elements of the Muslim nation, and that it is the best nation that has been brought forth to mankind, believing in its unity in spite of its different races and colors, and [in spite of] the distance between its countries.
22. Mutual counselling between the ruler and the subjects in a way that will ensure rights and duties and promote loyalty and allegiance.
25. Calling for [conversion to] Islam in all parts of the earth with wisdom and good religious exhortations is the duty of [both] the State and the individual...
26. Jihad in God's cause is a firm religious duty, a norm to be followed and an existing necessity. It is to continue [so] until the Day of Resurrection.

Chapter Two: The Purpose of Education and its General Goals

28. The purpose of education is understanding Islam correctly and completely, implanting and spreading the Islamic faith, providing the student with Islamic values, instructions and ideals, enabling him to obtain knowledge and various skills, promoting constructive behavioral inclinations, developing society economically, socially and culturally, and preparing the individual for becoming a useful member in building his society.

The General Islamic Goals which Fulfill the Purpose of Education

29. Promoting the spirit of loyalty to Islamic Law [Shari'ah] by disavowal of any system or principle contradicting Islamic Law, and by producing upright action and behavior in accordance with its general and comprehensive rules.

- 31. Providing the individual with the ideas, feelings and capabilities that are necessary for undertaking the mission of Islam.
- 33. Educating the believing citizen to be a useful brick in the construction of his nation, and to have a sense of responsibility for the service of his country and for its defense.
- 49. ... Emphasizing our country's... leading political role in protecting Islam and fulfilling its missionary duty...
- 50. Providing the students with [the knowledge of] at least another living language, besides their native one, so that they acquire sciences, knowledge, arts and useful inventions, and convey our sciences and knowledge to other societies and [thus] make them contribute to the propagation of Islam and to the service of humanity.
- 60. Awakening the spirit of Islamic Jihad in order to resist our enemies, reclaim our rights, return our [past] glories, and perform the duty of the Islamic mission.

Chapter Three: The Goals of the [Various] Phases of Education

Subchapter 1: Nurseries and Kindergartens and Their Goals

- 64. Forming a religious orientation that is based on monotheism and suits [their] innate nature.

Subchapter 2: The Elementary Phase and Its Goals

- 73. Inculcating the correct Islamic faith in the child's soul and taking care of him by an integrative Islamic education [which will encompass] his morals, body, mind, language, and his [sense of] belonging to the nation of Islam.

- 74. Training him to pray...

Subchapter 3: The Intermediate Phase and Its Goals

- 83. Consolidating the Islamic faith in the student's soul...
- 89. Firing his [the student's] zeal to renew the glories of the Muslim nation to which he belongs, and to resume the march on the path of honor and glory.
- 91. Strengthening the student's awareness, so that he will know - according to his age - how to confront misleading information, destructive movements and alien principles.

Subchapter 4: The Secondary Phase and Its Goals

- 95. Supporting the Islamic faith which will give the student a proper outlook on the universe, mankind and life in this world and the hereafter, providing him with fundamental and cultural Islamic concepts which will make him proud of Islam and able to call upon [others] to [embrace] it, and to defend it.
- 104. Preparing the student for Jihad in God's cause, spiritually and physically.
- 107. Forming the positive awareness with which the student will confront destructive ideas and misleading orientations.

Chapter Four: Planning for the [Various] Phases of Education

Subchapter 5: Planning for Higher Education

The Islamic University

- 142. A Grand Islamic University will be established for the preparation of [Muslim] clergymen specializing in the Islamic sciences and in the sciences of the Arabic language, in order to revive the Islamic heritage, work for its flourishing and perform the duty of Muslim missionary work.

143. The Islamic university will enjoy special sponsorship so that it will become a center of influence in the Muslim world and elsewhere. It will have an independent legal status and will be directly connected to the Kingdom's monarch.

Chapter Five: Special Rules

Subchapter 2: Girls' Education

153. Girls' education aims at the upbringing of the girl in a correct Islamic way, so that she will fulfill her mission in life and will be a successful house-keeper, an ideal wife and a good mother, and at preparing her to do what conforms to her innate nature such as teaching, nursing and medical practice.

154. The State takes care of girls' education, provides the necessary means - as much as possible - in order to absorb all those [girls] who reach the age of education, and gives them opportunities in branches of education that fit a woman's nature and satisfy the country's need.

155. Coeducation of boys and girls is prevented in all education phases, except in nurseries and kindergartens.

Subchapter 6: Private Education

175. The State encourages private education in all phases. It is subject to the competent educational authorities professionally and administratively...

176. Opening private schools and institutes is licensed exclusively by the competent educational authorities. It is not permitted for non-Saudis [to open private schools].

Chapter Six: Means of Education

209. The school textbook should be harmonious with the requirements of Islam, faultless linguistically, and should fulfill the curriculum's goals, as well as its scientific, practical and moral purposes.

215. The competent authorities take care of the youth and direct it according to plans designed by a select committee of well-known Muslim personalities. They [i.e., the plans] aim at Islamic guidance, moral protection, promotion of intellectual and cultural talents, and practice of living a life of strength, manhood and activity.

218. The State attaches importance to censorship of books that are published inside the Kingdom or abroad. [Publication of books is] not permitted, except for what is compatible with the nation's faith, with its intellectual orientations, and with its educational goals.

Chapter Nine: General Rules

232. Education of all types, phases, apparatus and means works for the realization of Islamic objectives. It is subject to the rules and requirements of Islam...

233. All types and phases of education are free. The State does not demand education fees.

234. The State disburses periodical awards to the students in specific types of education and training.

Textbooks

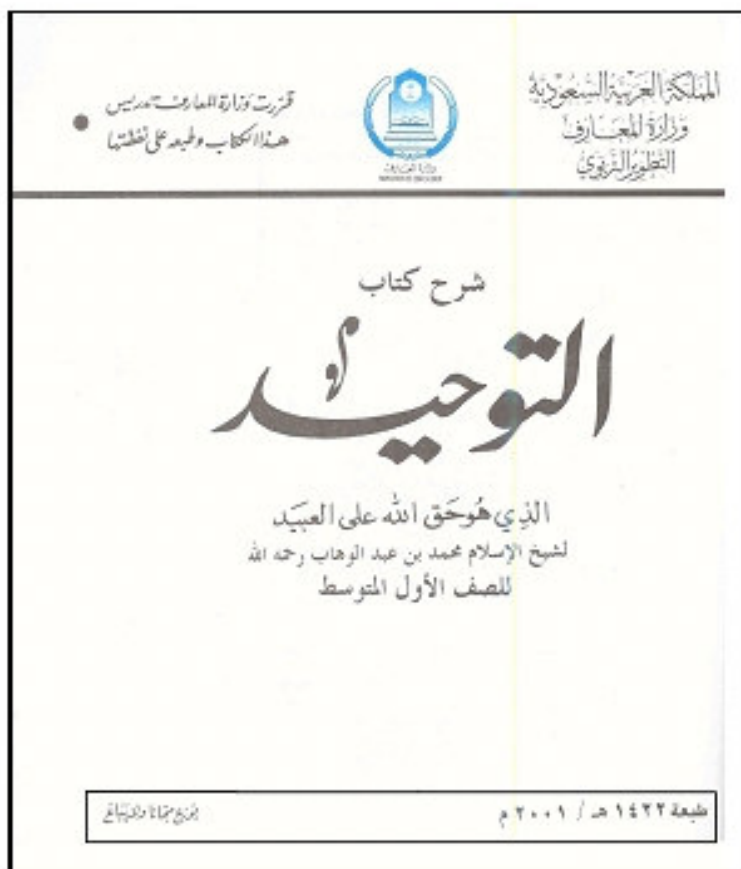
The Ministry of Education is the main authority in the Kingdom that issues textbooks which are used in all non-higher education systems, including those that are not under the Ministry's jurisdiction. A textbook is written by one or more professionals, and after being approved by the Ministry it is

published at the State's expense and distributed free to the students. It is possible for other educational bodies to publish textbooks as well, under special authorization, to be used in their own institutions. One of the books acquired by CMIP was published by the (female) supervisors of girls' education in the Riyadh province.

Within the Ministry of Education, the body in charge of textbook publication is the Center for Educational Development. Each book bears its stamp, in addition to the following phrase: The Ministry of Education has decided to use this book for teaching and to publish it at its expense. On the cover page of each book there is an emblem of the Saudi Ministry of Education and an inscription which says:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Ministry of Education
Educational Development

At the bottom of the cover page on the right, the Hijri and the common years are specified, and on the left, an inscription says: To be distributed free of charge and not to be sold



Almost every book begins with a short preface by the Minister of Education, with his signature, followed by an introduction to both students and teachers by the author/s. In certain cases, the teacher is given additional instructions on how to use the book.

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