



**BROKEN
CHALK**

Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the United
Nations Human Rights Council 4th Cycle – 45th Session

Right to Education

Country Review: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Submitting Organization: BROKEN CHALK

July 2023

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Broken Chalk is an Amsterdam-based NGO established in 2020 that monitors and minimises worldwide human rights violations in education. We aim to promote universal and equal access to education for all.

We encourage and support achieving societal peace with our international sponsors and partners by advocating for intercultural tolerance, preventing radicalism and polarisation, and tackling educational inequalities.

Table of Contents

- Introduction: 3**
- Quality of education: 3**
- Gender Inequality: 4**
- Socioeconomically disadvantaged students: 4**
- Students with disabilities: 4**
- Recommendations to improve current challenges: 5**
- References: 6**

Introduction:

1. Broken Chalk is a non-profit organisation with one main goal - To protect human rights in education. The organisation started with a website and articles and is currently working on multiple projects, each aiming to fight human rights violations in the educational sphere. As the UPR is related to human rights violations, inequalities, human trafficking, and other violations, Broken Chalk prepares this article for the fourth Cycle and the specific country – the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
2. In the last cycle, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia received 258 recommendations and supported 182 recommendations in adopting its UPR outcome at Human Rights Council 40 in March 2019 (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2018). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has addressed many issues highlighted in the previous Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycles. Saudi Arabia has introduced an economic vision called Vision 2030, which involves educational reform, mandated by the Tatweer Project, focusing on projects such as enhancing schools' teaching methods and strategies (Allmnakrah and Evers, 2019). Tatweer Project has trained more than 400,000 teachers in school management, educational supervision, computer science, and self-development (Arab News, 2017). It has also revised Saudi's curriculum to keep pace with advanced international science curricula (Arab News, 2017). This report will provide an update on the previous issues related to education, plus recommendations on how to deal with new ones.

Quality of education:

3. There are still some issues regarding the quality of education in Saudi Arabia despite the ongoing developmental work in this sector. The curriculum in Saudi Arabia has been criticised for its lack of relevance to the needs of a modern workforce, with limited emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Allmnakrah and Evers, 2019). The reliance on traditional assessment methods, such as memorization-based exams, limits students' thinking abilities and inhibits the development of practical skills required to compete for 21st-century jobs (Allamakhrah, 2013).
4. There is a lack of professionalism in education reform implementation (Allmnakrah and Evers, 2019). The quality of education could be better overall, and school children from Saudi Arabia score poorly in comparative tests, with a university dropout rate of almost 50 per cent (McKinsey Global Institute, 2015). While Saudi Arabia is culturally and educationally similar to other traditional Asian societies such as Singapore, Malaysia, and South Korea, these countries surpass it in mathematics and science, advancing as knowledge societies and knowledge-based economies (Elyas and Picard, 2018). There is a lack of colleges that teach liberal arts - disciplines that encourage critical thinking and independent thought (Allmnakrah and Evers, 2019). The lack of students educated in these disciplines has broader implications for the Saudi economy (Allmnakrah and Evers, 2019).
5. There is a critical need to enhance teacher training and professional development programs to improve teaching quality and pedagogical approaches. There need to be more training

opportunities to ensure effective teaching practices (Allmnakrah and Evers, 2019). Inadequate facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and limited resources impact the learning environment and hinder effective teaching and learning processes (Al-Sughair, 2014).

Gender Inequality:

6. Despite recent improvements, women in Saudi Arabia still face barriers to accessing education, including cultural norms and restrictions on mobility. All women are not allowed to travel to university alone. Hence, many must be driven to and from college campuses by a male relative or a chauffeur - which poorer families cannot afford (Roula, 2004). The gender-segregated education system restricts interactions between male and female students, limiting their exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences (Roula, 2004).
7. Gender stereotypes and biases persist within educational materials and teaching practices, reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting opportunities for girls and women (Aljuaythin, 2018). The lack of comprehensive career guidance and counselling for females contributes to limited educational and career choices, further perpetuating gender disparities (Al-Asfour et al. 2017).

Socioeconomically disadvantaged students:

8. Students from low-income families face challenges in accessing quality education due to financial constraints, which can result in disparities in educational outcomes (Al-Khamri, 2019). The limited availability of early childhood education programs for children from low-income families in Saudi Arabia has led to an educational disadvantage and affected their long-term academic success (Lash, 2016).
9. Poverty has contributed to high school dropout rates, as students from low-income backgrounds need to work to support their families instead of pursuing education (Al-Khamri, 2019). Students from low-income backgrounds also need access to educational resources, such as textbooks, computers, and internet connectivity, which can hinder their learning opportunities (Albalawi, 2021). Schools in economically disadvantaged areas also need more infrastructure and facilities, including classrooms, libraries, and laboratories, which negatively impact the learning environment (Albalawi, 2021).

Students with disabilities:

10. Disabled students face challenges accessing inclusive education due to inadequate infrastructure, lack of specialised instructional materials, and social stigma (Barry, 2021). Teachers have limited training and resources to support students with disabilities effectively, resulting in a gap in inclusive educational practices (Alsamiri, 2018). Many schools in Saudi Arabia lack accessible facilities for students with disabilities, including ramps, elevators, and specialised classrooms, making it difficult for them to participate fully in the educational environment (Aldabas, 2015). The availability of technical programs and services for students

with disabilities is limited, particularly in rural parts of Saudi Arabia. This lack of adequate support hinders the educational progress and inclusion of students with disabilities (Aldabas, 2015).

Recommendations to improve current challenges:

- 11.** Broken Chalk recognises the improvements in the educational sphere of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia but would like to recommend the following sites for improving their education:
- 12.** Invest in comprehensive and ongoing teacher training programs to enhance teaching methods, pedagogical approaches, and subject knowledge in collaboration with the teachers who can inform their curriculum and teaching methods best suited to their specific students and their needs. This will improve the quality of education and ensure teachers are equipped with the necessary skills to address diverse learning needs.
- 13.** Introduce interdisciplinary approaches, critical thinking skills, and practical application of knowledge to foster creativity, innovation, and problem-solving abilities among students. This can also include the introduction of disciplines such as liberal arts that centre critical thinking and independent thought.
- 14.** Implement inclusive education practices that ensure equal access and opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities and from marginalised backgrounds.
- 15.** Provide necessary support services, resources, and accommodations to create an inclusive learning environment. For example; making schools and classrooms wheelchair friendly.
- 16.** Expand access to quality early childhood education programs to promote the holistic development of children and provide a strong foundation for future learning. Emphasise play-based knowledge, social-emotional development, and early literacy and numeracy skills.
- 17.** Ensure schools in all regions have adequate infrastructure and facilities, especially in underserved areas.
- 18.** Provide extra funding for students from low-income families.
- 19.** Foster digital literacy skills among students and teachers to effectively navigate and utilise technology.
- 20.** Integrating technology into the curriculum enhances engagement and facilitates personalised learning experiences.
- 21.** Foster collaboration between educational institutions, industries, and higher education institutions to bridge the gap between academic learning and industry requirements.
- 22.** Establish work-integrated learning opportunities, apprenticeships, and partnerships for career guidance and internships.

23. Use assessments to inform instruction, measure progress, and provide feedback to students, teachers, and policymakers.
24. Implement policies and initiatives to address gender inequality in education, including promoting equal access to education for females, eliminating gender biases in textbooks and teaching materials, and encouraging female representation in STEM fields.

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