Education and Human Capital Development in Bahrain:"Future International Collaboration with Malaysia"

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Abstract

During the past few years, Bahrain has emerged itself as a challenging nation at different fronts. Education remains at the forefront of planning at the economic levels; this of course is related immensely to the need of human capital development at national level. Present government has initiated reforms in major fields and education sector reforms include establishing new polytechnic college, teachers training programs and taking initiatives to improve vocational programs at upper secondary school level, and rigorous initiatives of quality assurance of the educational institutions. This was accompanied by issuing licenses to large number of private universities. This paper will investigate the opportunities for future collaborations and the areas of mutual interests with Malaysian education system. A generating force for these efforts is the statement of his Excellency Crown Prince of Bahrain Salman Bin Hamad Al-Khalifa “Investing in people is very important to the future of Bahrain.”

Key Words


I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In the Middle East, for almost forty years Bahrain is a well-established business hub and mature economy in the Gulf with having large financial institutions. It is the leader in financial services in the entire Gulf region. The Central Bank of Bahrain which is country’s single financial regulator and it is considered to be the region’s most respected and the best financial
regulator. As Bahrain has the best economic infrastructure, enforced rule of law and transparency in the financial matters, other countries of the Gulf follow Bahrain’s rules and regulations to formulate their own rules and regulations and infrastructure (The Central Bank of Bahrain Report, 2009).

Bahrain has open and transparent environment for the investors from all around the world, provides better facilities to the business community and that’s why there is sustainability in the programs initiated in the country, has attained confidence of the investors, emerging skilled manpower and the system good governance. It has always focused in paving the foundations deep for setting up the landmarks. It is the well planning of the government in the fields of economy and business which are now mature and diversified that the government has focused on productivity-lead growth instead of wholly depending upon oil. According to a survey conducted in the region, people of Bahrain are five times more productive than the people living in the other states of the Gulf. The people of Bahrain have unique vision about the future based on the sustainable and productive economic diversification across various sectors of economy, business and socio-cultural life. They are the followers of free market strategy, democratic and the demonstrators of rule of law in their individual as well as national cause. The long term policies of the state have made Bahrainis prosperous and democratic people than the citizens of the other states of the region (International Business Consultancy Group, 2014). It is pertinent to mention that these are the policies and strategies of the state, and the most civic nature of the people of Bahrain that it has become the first choice of the investors around the globe for their MENA business operations.

According to index of Economic Freedom Report, 2009, Bahrain provides open and liberal business environment in the Middle East and has been ranked at 16th position in the world (Miller, Holmes, & Feulner, 2009). In the entire Middle East, Bahrain is the gateway to the market access of the Gulf economies. Bahrain’s better rule of law situation, the longest and stable business record provides good environment for the business. The people of Bahrain constitute a liberal society; they are well educated and skilled workforce in the Gulf. Dues to these factors operational costs are less as compared to the other competitive business centers in the region.

The Kingdom of Bahrain was the first state in the Gulf region to embrace prominence in the international oil market and it initiated first to start the diversification process away from hydrocarbons to the productivity-lead economy which is now the established norm in the entire Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Being well established and well regulated financial services sector, having strategic location in the region, open business environment, politically stable state has attracted generous direct investment, it successfully proceeded on the way to progress and remained unaffected during the global financial crisis of 2008 compared to its neighboring GCC states. During the global financial crisis it utilized its surplus earnings of its boom years, effective economic agreements and concentrating on developing its human capital, Bahrain has successfully held firm to long-term economic strengthening plans (The Report: Bahrain, 2013)
II. HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT - A GENERAL PERSPECTIVE.

“Human capital is the stock of competencies, knowledge, habits, social and personality attributes, including creativity, cognitive abilities, embodied in the ability to perform labor so as to produce economic value. It is an aggregate economic view of the human being acting within economies, which is an attempt to capture the social, biological, cultural and psychological complexity as they interact in explicit and/or economic transactions. Many theories explicitly connect investment in human capital development to education, and the role of human capital in economic development, productivity growth, and innovation has frequently been cited as a justification for government subsidies for education and job skills training” (Simkovic, 2013).

Human capital can be defined as collaborative composition of knowledge, skills and abilities of the employees working for common purpose in an organizational (group i.e. members of an organization, or department who are assigned same kind of productive work and they work as a unit. Resources that are rare and valuable develop a competitive advantage while non-substitutable and inimitable resources sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Unit specific human capital is associated to a specific unit and has very little relevance to other units in the organization. Unit specific human capital is capable of creating sustained competitive advantage (Hatch, & Dyer, 2004). Other form of human capital is known to be generic human capital that is transferable across variety of firms and departments. It is very rare but a most effective human capital (Barney, & Wright, 1998).

So we can say that human capital is a set of theories which the economists use to explore the link between earnings and the skills, physical and intellectual capabilities which enable individual to lead a productive life and perform tasks in a most effective way. It is the combination of skills which an individual gain through the process of education and training, the capabilities which a person acquires through self-investment or the sponsored investment either by parents or by the employer in the case of additional training for improving specific skills to master the excellence.

According to the economist point of view, there always remain a correlation between the educational and training level of the worker and his productive capacity. This relationship is complicated as many other factors also cast their impact on the production and among these influencing factors are capital investment, technology regulation and foreign trade. In recent years much concern at the regional and national level has been shown towards the preparation for fulfilling the needs of future workers for the business and industry of educational institutions. It is observed that more talented and educated workers contribute much higher than less educated workforce to productivity and economic success for the flourishing economy.

Education of the future workforce is a critical part of preparing them for productive lives within society. By increasing the regional capacity of the human capital generation and utilizing this capital can become a successful strategy for important regional policies for success in future high
tech economy. Increased capacity of human capital provides the foundation on which the institutions and empires are built and it is the foundation on most of the growth and output in recent years.

Creative, innovative and productive learning institutions can change the region’s ability to adapt to fragmented markets, exerts positive competitive environment, acceptance of ensure that the regional innovations will result hi high living standards. Human capital hence provides foundations of learning institutions, which ultimately are the building blocks of learning regional economies of the region (Gilmore, 1999).

![Figure 1: Accenture, Institute for Higher Performance Business - Human Capital Development - Issue One. November 1, 2003](image)

Human capital is “the collective attitudes, skills and abilities of the people contribute to organizational performance and productivity.” The expenditures incurred in workers training, development, health care and support is an investment for the future progress and it should not be considered as the expense (Stockley, 2005). The Human Capital Development is quite an important factor for the economy of a country; it supports investment in people through variety of means which include education, training, coaching, internships, mentoring, organizational development and human resource management. Better planning in human capital investment brings positive developmental changes in trained and skilled workforce of the future.

### III. Human Capital Development in the Kingdom of Bahrain

#### A. Education

Education and training of the local population is very important for the human development in the GCC countries. It is dire need to strengthen the workforce of the region without gender biases
because inadequately educated workforce may hamper the economic development of these countries and can become serious obstacle towards their future aims (Arab World Competitiveness Report, 2007). The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council are rich in natural resources like oil and gas. However these countries are suffering skilled and unskilled workforce shortage, the local workforce likes to do executive jobs and for the skilled workforce these countries have dependence on foreign workforce. An empirical study conducted in 1999 shows shortage of Gulf national workforce in many professions and technical sectors such as management, mechanical engineering, industrial engineering and information technology (Al-Masnad 1999). At macro and micro levels the GCC countries are facing serious challenges and the most challenging one is dependency on natural resources, high dependency on expatriate workforce for both skilled and unskilled chores and jobs, inadequate education system and low female participation of women in workforce. Most of the GCC countries like Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have realized to focus on long term vision and planning to elevate the highlighted challenges to provide strong base for local human capital develop in the region (Achoui, 2009).

Bahrain has reformed its educational system and promoting educational progress in the Gulf. It has established public education system the Gulf region first time in 1919, and providing equal opportunities for male and female population to access and get benefit from state owned educational institutions. In Bahrain attending schools is compulsory and education is free for all children putting Bahrain as a leader of the region when it comes to literacy standing tall at 87%. The state consumes 11% of its GDP on education of its people.

The recent government reforms in education have brought significant changes in the sector. In the current reforms, the government has structured a better educational plan and in the plan teachers will be trained to meet the international standards, new polytechnic college will be established in Bahrain to bring improvement in the country’s higher secondary school, and the vocational training initiative and quality assurance in international standards educational plan, which ultimately raise accreditation standards and inspections for the education system. It will improve the performance of the educational system through regular national examination setup. The said reforms have been put in place to avoid any skills crunch in the country and may derail the economic development of the state. It is estimated that during the next ten years an additional workforce of 100,000 people is expected to enter the job market. All over the world women are joining all the professions which were once considered only for men. In the past the oil rich economies restrained female workforce limited and promoted patriarchal society. Consequently women in labor force in GCC region remain very slow as compared to other regions. At present women’s increasing participation in the workforce is due to declining fertility rate and women’s improved educational standards. In Bahrain women outnumber men in university education and their enrolment is at 66% and 60 % in Jordan (World Bank, 2003; UNIFEM, 2004).
According to the Central Bank of Bahrain statistics reported in 2007, highly skilled workforce in the Gulf is in Bahrain. The report reveals that financial services sector provides employment to about 12,000 people. More than 8,000 people of Bahrain nationals who constitute 67% of the financial sector workforce are working in the banking sector in Bahrain (The Central Bank of Bahrain, 2007).

In February 2009, the government of Bahrain established has established an educational regulatory authority “Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training” (QAA). The purpose of this regulatory body is to review and assess schools, universities and training institutions, as well as to conduct national examinations. The body is aimed to raise Educational standards and quality education within Bahrain. The QAA operates four monitoring units which are; Schools Review Unit, Vocational Training Review Unit, Higher Education Review Unit, and National Examinations Unit (Towards a Better Vision for Education, 2013).

Tamkeen is another regulatory authority working in Bahrain and it is an independent body whose purpose is to formulate strategies and operational plans to enhance the overall prosperity of Bahrain by investing in Bahrain’s employment and job creation cell and it has already made an investment of $100 million to provide sector specific skills training through its four year training plan to more than 18,000 Bahraini nationals (Tamkeen Profile, 2014).

There are more than more than 200 primary and secondary schools which are run by the state and providing free education to the people of Bahrain. There are about 30 privately run schools which are educating the local people as well the migrated labour force children. These schools offer curricula from the United Kingdom, United States of America, Pakistan, India, Japan and France.

The vocational training institutes educate the youth the special vocational training skills to the students who will be the next required skilled workforce to the various sectors. Many institutions in Bahrain have been successfully training the students with specific skills that are related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation. These vocational education training programs provide skilled labour force for various industries such as retail and merchandizing, information technology, tourism and hotel management and such other.

The GCC countries has very much dependency on global human capital in achieving diversification ambitions but they can keep this diversification sustainable by adopting strategies to develop a bank of local human capital and for this purpose it is needed to enhance the capacity of higher educational institutions to develop necessary techniques for transferring foreign knowledge. The regulatory environment of the Gulf encourages high level knowledge mobility and transfer among foreign companies, but the gap between the potential and realized capacity generally called knowledge filter prevent possibilities of knowledge transfer to the local learners (Aces, et al., 2003). Higher education enhances the professional capacities of the learned personals and increases foreign knowledge transfer and the career choices of people of Bahrain.
Higher education plays a lead role in providing advanced skills which are very important to thrive in globally competitive environment. There is large number of institutions which offer specializations in variety of subjects such as accounting, finance, business, administration, medicine, healthcare, and information technology.

The University of Bahrain along with education hosts conferences, seminars and symposia on regular basis to train the faculty and the researchers for conducting research. In December 2008 the University conducted a symposium to discuss the role and future of Islamic banking. This symposium was among the prominent programs of the university and large number of students actively remained connected with the event in the Kingdom. The Centre for Islamic Finance is working under umbrella of The Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance (BIBF). It is conducting research in Islamic finance with excellence. In January 2009, The Centre for Islamic Finance was awarded with ‘World’s Best Islamic Training Institution Award’ for 2008 by CPI (Bahrain Fact Sheet, 2009).

B. Women Empowerment

In the 21st century, women enjoy more freedom and power than ever before and it is the fruit of the continuous struggle of women organizations till the end of 20th century. The statistics of United Nations Human Development Report published in 1995 reveals that "an estimated USD16 trillion in global output is currently 'invisible,' out of which USD11 trillion is estimated to be produced by women worldwide." For human security and empowerment of women in the economy there is vital importance of education to achieve these objectives which the world has recognized for women of the world (Negash, 2006). Women in Bahrain are working equally with men in all professions; they are successfully overcoming the gender biases, getting more jobs. The number of women working in higher positions is increasing. The success of the organizations is in reducing gender disparity in decision making and top management positions as men and women are different and each one has different perception in solving the issues (AlHajj, 2014).

Bahrain is among those leading countries in the Gulf which highly focus on education and consider it is the factor which lead to the economic financial and social development of the country and equally focus on the education of girls.

Important statistics regarding female education are as:

- 49% of the total enrolment of the student in elementary level students are females and 51% are the males for the year 2001-2002. Percentage of women who have attained diploma or higher education has increased by 11% since 2001 in 2010-11.
- Gender gap between both sexes in education is practically non-existent.
- Percentage of female higher education graduates passing out from government institutes and universities in 2010-11 has reached 57.69% in comparison to male
graduates at 42.31%

- During last two decades from 1981-2001, illiteracy rate has decreased significantly among man and women especially within the youth decreased from 48.1% to 17% in females and from 24.5 % to 15% in male population of Bahrain.
- From the statistics we conclude that difference is non-existent between the ages of 15-24 years amongst both genders (Bahraini Women in Numbers, 2013)

In the year 1920, women of Bahrain were given the right to attend schools to attain formal education, from then women have contributed to the development of their country at their level best. They are working shoulder to shoulder with their male counter parts in public and private sector and playing their role in fostering the development of the country. They have worked on the leading positions and have proved themselves as competent administrators through their outstanding capabilities. Under the country’s political and democratic reforms carried by the current government Women have attained more empowerment and rights in the socio-cultural and economic life. Bahrain is leading the front role in empowering women in the entire region and they are actively participating towards the betterment of society (Beijing Platform of Action, 1995). Bahraini women have captured higher administrative posts in ministries and institutions due to their higher educational levels and they have successfully upgraded their positions from recipients to active participants in the decision making (Supreme Council for Women, 2014).

In the last two decades, many projects have emerged at the national level in the Kingdom of Bahrain to enhance gender equity and empowerment of women (Supreme Council for Women, 2014). Women workforce participation in employment market has increased as the norms and cultural values of the countries are changing and providing favorable environment for women of Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait and Saudi Arabia is also promoting women workforce by providing them jobs on culturally acceptable norms in the country to reduce dependency on expatriates (Calvert, & AlShetaiwi, 2002). The studies reveal that the GCC female workforce is better educated than the male counterparts and they are capable of performing higher level of jobs and decision making positions (Girgis, 2002).

The government of Bahrain has very much focused on the empowerment of women through education and it is very much conscious to uplift status of women in the Gulf. It is the serious efforts of Bahrain that The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has ranked Bahrain fourth out of 155 countries worldwide for its efforts in building the capabilities of women in the country (Bahrain Factsheet, 2013). During the period of 1971-2010, percentage of female workforce in Bahrain has increased from 4.9% to 33.5%. The statistics indicate that due to better opportunities of education for women and promoting equal opportunities for both the sexes and abiding the objectives of Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) acceded by Bahrain in 2002 has empowered the women in Bahrain. Women representation increased in education and specialization jobs whereas men representation increased in executive, judiciary during the year 2011 (Women in Numbers, 2013).
Women Leadership in the Kingdom of Bahrain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women holding Decision Making Positions</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First female Flight pilot from Bahrain joins the national flagged airline.</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of first female judge in Bahrain and in Gulf States.</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the UN General Assembly, Election of Bahraini Woman as president.</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election of Ten women of Bahrain as members of the consultative council (Shura).</td>
<td>Since 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of second Bahraini women and member Shura as a Minister of Social Affairs.</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First ever Bahraini woman appointed as Minister of Health.</td>
<td>21st April 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of Bahraini woman as undersecretary.</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of five Bahraini women on Assistant Secretarial posts in cultural affairs, civil service,</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women affairs, social affairs and census organization.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>First ever appointment of two Bahraini women as members of the GCC Consultative Corporation.</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First time appointment of two Bahraini women in army as Colonel in Bahrain and the Gulf.</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First ever female Bank Director in Bahrain and the Gulf.</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of three Bahraini women as deans at the University of Bahrain.</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of a Bahraini woman as president of the University of Bahrain.</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of three Bahraini women as prosecutors.</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First ever business woman in Bahrain elected to the Board of Bahrain’s Chamber of Commerce &amp; Industry.</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The first Bahraini woman appointed as General Secretary of Supreme Council for Women.</td>
<td>8 November 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Bahraini woman appointed as Ambassador.</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Large number of Bahraini women is working on the executive positions in industries running in private sector like telecommunications, consulting services and banking sector.*

Projects Empowering Women

Financing of small and medium enterprises. The project has been initiated to empower women in the country in 1999, to fulfill the agreement between United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Government of Bahrain.

Establishing a "Family Bank". Kingdom of Bahrain has announced its plan to setup a bank for the poor, on the footsteps of "Grameen Bank" Bangladesh, which aims to provide small loans to help poor families.

Productive Families Project. The project was launched in 1978 as a stable social aid programme to help needy families and transform them into productive families.

The Bahrain Business Incubator Center (BBIC). The center aims to ensure faster growth of the business, as well as increase the competitiveness of products.

The role of the Bahrain Development Bank to support small and medium enterprises. The Bahrain Development Bank played a significant role in supporting small and medium enterprises through the provision of loan financing and organization of a number of training programs as well as providing advisory services to entrepreneurs.
IV. Bahrain’s Economic and Strategic Outlook

During the past few years Bahrain has attained high growth rate in the region. It has exceptionally recorded nominal growth rate in high double digits since 2003. Extra earnings from high oil prices and huge liquidity in the region have brought positive effects on Bahrain economy to show excellence performance over the past five years. For first half of 2008 the region remained unaffected by the global financial crisis and real GDP has grown at 6%. However, global economic crisis, lower oil prices, reduced oil production have lowered the consumer spending. All these factors have severely affected the economies in the region and this has impacted on economy of Bahrain too and its economic growth rate expected to reduce around 2.5-3.0% for 2009 with more of a downside risk.

The Kingdom has remained an open economy since long and has attracted direct foreign investment in financial, telecom and real estate sectors. Over the past few years, Bahrain had witnessed strong private/foreign participation in economy. Foreign companies have brought their investment in Bahrain due to “its geographical environment, well-regulated authorities and low cost factor in setting up operations”. The diversification and privatization initiatives introduced by recent government have enhanced uplift of the economy. These are the clear and transparent initiatives that have resulted to upgrading the rank of Bahrain at the table of “freest economy in the world by Heritage Foundation and most free economy in the MENA region (Index of Economic Freedom Report, 2009). The World Bank has ranked Bahrain at 18th in its Rankings due to better business environment setup and fair policies (Doing Business, 2009).

“Bahrain has decided to go ahead with its key government backed development projects in 2009-10 budget. Bahrain has stepped up efforts to bolster the country's infrastructure, and planned to upgrade the existing port of Mina Salman, by investing USD137million Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Port that has become operative since March 2009, and the expansion of Bahrain International Airport has increased its cargo handling capacity to 1million tonnes annually. However, the sharp fall in oil prices will significantly constrain the government's ability to increase spending and in effect the ongoing infrastructural development projects currently underway as oil exports provide the majority of government revenue” (Global Research Bahrain, 2014)

The 2030 vision gives utmost priority to education it states: “....we will develop a clear strategy for raising standards and performance in our schools, vocational institutions and universities. The strategy will need to:

Focus on developing our most important educational resource, our teachers, by improving their recruitment and training, enhancing the management of their performance, improving their image in society, and increasing the attractiveness of careers in teaching”. This vision points out a huge revision of educational system and a new approach is envisaged to lever education most likely Bahrain will need partnership expertise to implement this ambitious plan.
V. OPPORTUNITIES FOR MUTUAL COLLABORATION: CONCLUSION

Malaysia being a major player in the economies of south East Asia, it is obvious that a country like Bahrain could benefit tremendously from the collaboration and joint ventures. Bahrain as I explained earlier has all the constituents that will lead to successful outcomes. Bahrain is well prepared due to its clear vision for the next 20 years. I encourage educators to start moving around to capture opportunities that mould the future of the two nations. There is lot to be done regarding Bahraini women empowerment. Malaysia may be of great help in this important matter. Bahrain is anxious to push the issue of women empowerment to the extent where Bahrain becomes a leader in consolidating human capital development. Women being a major figure in the equation of progress, Malaysia could open new pathways in terms of exchanging expertise and enhancing future collaborations at different levels.

Referring to figure 2, the policy makers in the two countries have identified the main areas of collaboration which I think it needs to activate mechanisms that are easy and feasible to accelerate harmony and integration. Bahrain being a hub for financial institutions, especially in Islamic Banking is quite sensible to enhance plans for such important economic activity. Joint venture universities are a step in the right direction. Universities in Malaysia could embrace existing private universities in Bahrain, also could create new venture to transfer knowledge to Bahrain. The question arises; how can we do this? I say by intensifying meetings, visits and joint conferences for each sector.

I believe a bigger role should be given to the coordinating bodies, which will encourage investors from both sides to function together. Also, I propose a clear plan to implement actions associated with a follow up system to monitor any deviations and delays.

Human capital development being at the center of thought of the political leadership in Bahrain, should indicate to the Malaysian investors (in the government or the private sector) to start now with no delay. Basically, training & education are at the top of the list. There is a demand for quality education, which proved success in Malaysia and to be implemented in Bahrain. Other opportunities are to be considered as previously cited. If you examine figure 2 investors could scan the option, assess the alternatives and then make their investing decisions.
FIGURE 2: I think there is a good potential to establish Science Park that stimulates research, education and industry. This recommendation needs to take further to find ways to start such a promising project.

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Prof. Dr. Saad Znad Darwish is the Vice President for Administrative Affairs & Finance & Community Engagement at Applied Science University (ASU) in Bahrain. Before joining ASU he held the position of VP Academic at DU, also he held the position of Head of the Faculty of Business Administration and he is a member of the Administrative Board of the College of Economics and Administration Sciences at Zaitooneh University in Jordan. He also held the University Vice President position at Al Nahreen University in Iraq and the Dean prior to his assumption as University Vice President. He was elected as a referee for international conferences and as a number of editorial boards in international journals. He completed his PhD of Business Administration in Risk Management from Polytechnic of Central London in collaboration with Surrey University in United Kingdom and finished his Master of Insurance Management Degree from University of Baghdad. He did achieve his B.Sc. of Business Administration at Al Hikmah American University in Baghdad.


Professor Saad Darwish received and have been awarded of different prizes and honors. He was awarded forty letters of honors from different academic institutions in Iraq. He received prizes and scientific research contributions in the Ministry of Higher Education - Iraq. Sharja Prize for the best thesis in the Arab Region in Management Sciences for supervising the Thesis entitled "Knowledge Management" was awarded to one of his student. He also received Higher Order of Merit by the government of Iraq for continuous research activities in 1996.