Preface

Last year, as I was reminiscing on my 20-year journey in higher education, a thought-provoking idea struck: why not edit a book in the area of Higher Education Policy and Practice? My next thought was, Which region should I focus on? This is because basically education and higher education is specific to country, nation, and region. After deep thinking and analysis, I decided to focus on MENA, which has in the past decade experienced exponential growth in the higher education sector, and half my own one-and-a-half decade experience as an academic and educationalist in the field of higher education has been spent in the region.

I was, I must admit, dubious about such a project, even though I have a keen interest in it. However, I also realized that a contribution in the area of higher education is equally important to a contribution in management, engineering, or scientific research. A few years ago, I was program advisor for a management program and coordinator of Masters programmes, where I started my research in higher education. Even though I have done some higher education research, including development of a handbook on Doctorate education, pedagogical issues in management education, reviewing challenges of management education for academic staff and students, my skepticism deepened as I thought more about the project as an editor. I accepted the challenge and responsibility with a question to solve, How do I make this book useful and needed for players in the field of higher education in general and in the MENA region, specifically.

In an effort to juxtapose the thoughts, ideas, and theories of higher educationalists and knowledge management researchers who have followed the paradigm shift that has occurred, this volume has come together. As one seeks to update understanding of how higher education will place a greater role in creating and managing knowledge for the competitive advantage of organizations and overall economic and social development of nations, the understanding of higher education policy and practice becomes crucial. Moreover, “knowledge has to be improved, challenged, and increased constantly, or it vanishes” (Drucker, n.d.). Hence, it is rightly said: “The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles, but to irrigate deserts” (Lewis, n.d.).

OBJECTIVE OF THE BOOK

There is global interest in higher education, which is being transformed across the world due to globalization, technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship arising from university research and leading to economic growth. MENA region is not far behind with realization that knowledge creation is a must, and to ensure this happens, higher education policies and practices have to play a pivotal role.
TARGET AUDIENCE

Today, the interest in this subject is evident not only for many important institutes and universities but also for different professionals around the world. Identifying the theoretical as well as practical implications, the book can be used by faculty, students, researchers, entrepreneurs, managers, venture capitalists, investors, industry partners, and government officials’ representatives of technology transfer offices, incubators, science parks, research parks, and other professionals. Drawing on the latest developments, ideas, research, and best practices, this book intends to examine the implications of the changes taking place and how they affect higher education, especially in MENA region. It is important to know what is happening on both national and international fronts to be able to understand and develop effective responses to meet these new demands.

A big challenge was to find contributors. Contributions had to be original and not previously published. I sought contributions from around the world to make this happen, and I am pleased with the response received. As a result, this volume has an international flavor that offers a wide variety of viewpoints along a set of common themes. Further, I was happily surprised by the wide range of topics, contexts, and approaches that were submitted, and I am really excited to present you with the best of the submissions we received.

The book has a special focus in research on important issues that transcend the boundaries of a single system or country. It assists readers to develop a coherent understanding about higher education policy and practice and how lessons learned by the different perspectives presented might be transferred to new contexts. The book has 18 chapters that present different perspectives and have a special focus on current and relevant issues in the field of higher education policy and practice for MENA region.

Topics covered in the book include:

- Education Scenario in MENA Region
- Educational Development of MENA Region
- Effects of Globalization on Higher Education
- Ethics in Higher Education
- Technology in Higher Education
- Research and Development
- Case Studies

The chapters do not need to be read in their given order, although it is recommended to do so. Indeed, each of them can be read independently as they offer a complete point of view about the particular topic on which they focus. One of the great features of this book is its practicality. The chapters are based on research and experiences, and they offer the reader guidelines on how to effectively engage in the field of higher education, be it teaching-learning process, research, student and faculty development, academic leadership, or academic administration. In addition, managing teams, using technology appropriately, ethics, and governance issues are also dealt with. The global focus of this book is a welcome addition to the literature on higher education, especially for MENA region, where such studies are few. By drawing on research from multiple countries, this book offers a unique opportunity to examine how higher education policy and practice is around the globe. All the chapters have been double blind peer-reviewed in addition to initial review and short listing by the editor. The authors had to address those comments and suggestions made by the reviewers before they were accepted for publication in this refereed book.
Because of the variety of topics in the submissions, three sections: “Higher Education Policy and Practice in the MENA,” “Imperative Issues in Higher Education,” and “Case Approach and Best Practices” were developed, and the chapter submissions were grouped accordingly based on their coverage.

The first section is “Higher Education Policy and Practice in the MENA.” Here there are eight chapters exploring the higher education scenario. The first chapter is the “Introduction,” where Baporikar broadly outlines the concerns of higher education in general and more specific to MENA region. The second chapter in this section is “Towards Paradigm Shift in Higher Education in the MENA Region.” Al-Khatib herein addresses issues pertaining to the need to shift perspective in higher education in the MENA region, in the light of its growing importance as a developing entity with natural and human resources. The chapter identifies the role of higher education, in policies and practice, in addressing the needs of the region and transforming its resources, human and physical, to further its economic development. In the next chapter, “Higher Education in MENA through Global Lenses: Lessons Learned from International Rankings,” Hijazi, Sowter, and Nag introduce the main rankings systems of world universities, and analyse the performance of Arab universities in MENA region according to the results of these rankings. Weber, in his chapter, “Linking Education to Creating a Knowledge Society: Qatar’s Investment in the Education Sector,” argues that the recent substantial educational reforms in the state of Qatar are closely intertwined with planned future economic transformation (diversification). He also examines Qatar’s educational efforts to build a knowledge economy to transition away from a resource-rich export-based hydrocarbon economy towards economic activities linked to patents, research, trademarked technologies, skills, and knowledge products.

Shetty’s “Impact of Ethical Dilemmas on the Dignity of Higher Education and Research” reflects upon the current ethical debate going on. A massive young population is knocking at the doors of higher education while the society is crying “foul” for lack of emphasis on academic ethics. There is a need to re-orient, re-create, and enrich the systems of learning and to safeguard the dignity of higher education. This is the rationale behind this chapter, and the objective is to take an investigative look at the ethical dilemmas in higher education and research and the need for reforms.

Through their chapter, “Critical Review of Curriculum in Legal Financial Studies in Turkey: Perspectives and Prospects,” Banerji and Das attempt to sensitize the academic community. Curriculum development and legislation are often viewed as parallel issues that do not affect each other; however, it cannot be denied that without sound legislation or statute development, curriculum development will become stagnant and wither, eventually resulting in the deteriorated quality of manpower and economy alike. Education, legislation, and economy are co-related and therefore work in a cyclic and symbiotic manner. While investment and investor-friendly legislation is an imperative for a factor for a sound economy, a well-structured and updated education facilitates economy by providing good feedback to the legislatures with respect to the current laws and update the legislatures with the present trends and upcoming prospects of the international legal scenario. Bearing this rationale in mind, it cannot be denied that the three wings of economy work together co-relatively and co-dependently at the same time. As a country, Turkey sits in the confluence of East and West, making it a gateway to Europe as well as to the MENA region from either side. The strategic location of the country has made it tenable as the subject matter of the present chapter.

In “The Role of Social Capital in Higher Education Institutions,” Kipokin deals with the role of social capital in higher education institutions, thus explaining the concept of social capital, the dimension of social capital in higher education institutions (i.e., structural social capital and communication, relational social capital and social integration, and cognitive social capital and coordination), and the application
of social capital in higher education institutions in terms of social networks, social norms, social trust, and institutional trust. Social networks, high institutional trust, social trust, and a tendency to comply with regulations are the important social characteristics that facilitate the application of environmental initiatives in higher education institutions. The enforcement of social capital will be accompanied by successful higher education institution initiatives combined with significant change in the culture of higher education institutions, thus leading to the achievement of sustainability in higher education institutions. Understanding the role of social capital will significantly enhance the educational performance and achieve educational goals in higher education institutions.

The last chapter in this section is Deshpande’s “Entrepreneurship Approach to Higher Education: Policy Aspects.” He discusses elaborately how entrepreneurship approach will facilitate disseminating higher education and provide new alternatives to traditional models. Rapid changes in the world have been driven by powerful forces such as economics, politics, demographics, religion, and technology. With the advent of the globalization era, it is clear that entrepreneurship engagement is a rapidly expanding and evolving aspect of higher education that requires proper support and development. This chapter is dedicated to discussion and analysis of the forces coming to bear on higher education and how the entrepreneurship approach through higher education polices may proactively and effectively use these forces to increase the impact. It also provides subject matter on the educational development among diverse countries of the world as well as material to institutions, universities, and researchers to understand better the growing importance of the MENA region in today’s global economy. In particular, the chapter explores how global higher education and technological advancements are influencing the progress and prosperity of this region.

On the whole, these chapters bring out the challenges, policies, and practices in the MENA region, and an understanding of these vital issues would go a long way to increase the capability for developing knowledge into competitive advantage, and so this theme is called as “Higher Education Policy and Practice in the MENA.”

Four chapters fit nicely into the second section, “Imperative Issues in Higher Education.” Today, higher education demands policymakers and practitioners give serious thought to these indispensable issues. “Student Feedback Process in Enhancement of Quality of Higher Education” by Ojasalo facilitates to deepen the understanding of using student feedback in the quality management of higher education. As there are very few studies that have approached student feedback utilization in terms of two parallel processes, universities’ and students’ process, there is a clear need for such approach, since the university is the service provider and students are the customers. Understanding both sides and both processes gives a new and relevant perspective to this phenomenon. This chapter contributes to the literature by proposing a conceptual model of using student feedback in the quality management of higher education. The model illustrates two parallel combined processes and their actions: universities’ processes and students’ processes.

The growing trend is an increasing number of international student collaboration agreements among institutions of higher education to promote educative exchange programs, internationalization of teaching, research, curricula, etc. Vergas, in his chapter, “Networking International Student Collaboration and Experiential Exercise Projects,” aims to analyze and to reflect on the experiential exercise from the points of view of instructor and students attending University Center of Economic and Managerial Sciences at University of Guadalajara. Vergas also reflects on participating in the “X-Culture International Student Collaboration Project” as a professional, inter-personal, and inter-institutional networking platform.
“Ethics in Higher Education,” by Nair, discusses the various facets of education, the role of ethics, and emphasizes the perspective on the importance of ethics in higher education through a review of literature and primary study conducted involving the faculty of select universities. The convergence of Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) to add mobility to the teaching and learning community has become crucial. Pelet, Khan, Papadopoulou, and Bernardin, in the chapter “M-Learning: Exploring the Use of Mobile Devices and Social Media” present the results of an exploratory study on the use of smart phones and social media, identifying differences among countries, focusing on the MENA region. The chapter aids in better understanding the rapidly evolving and expanding technology of smart phones and social media and explores its potential for m-learning purposes. Results show that social media and mobile devices can be effectively combined in a promising way to enable m-learning.

The final section is “Case Approach or Best Practices,” consisting of six chapters wherein authors have shared their “experiences,” “best practices,” and “lessons learnt.” Manuel, in his chapter, “Some Keys for Success in Higher Education: A Case Approach,” examines the key issues that have contributed to several Israeli universities in high positions in the world ranking of universities. The keys examined are coexistence of a dual system, use of technology and informal-formal learning, early-childhood education, implementation of a very strict selection process, creation of a system based on efficient public expenditure on education, increasing role of women in education, and constant improvement of teachers. “Promotion of Research Culture in Sur University: A Case Approach,” by Sakkthivel and Sharieh, provides a concerted framework in which Sur University College (SUC) in Oman achieved its mission on promoting research culture among faculty members and students. Notwithstanding the explanation about the promotion of research culture, the chapter portrays the development and execution of different research aspects through Approach, Deployment, Results, and Improvement (ADRI) approach. Lessons learnt in the process are also provided.

Das and Das, in their chapter, “Higher Education Concerns for Natives in the Post-Crisis Period: Canada vs. India – A Case Approach,” deliberate on the higher education and academic research sectors of the Canadian education sector post-2008 global crisis. They examine the impact of declining funding both from private and government sources and other adversaries to the access of the aboriginals to education and thus attempts to bring to light how many educational opportunities are available to the natives in the post-crisis period in a comparative tone with India. Thus’s “Performance Evaluation in Higher Education by Return on Investments Approach: A Case of B-Schools” discusses performance evaluation in higher education by Return on Investment (ROI) approach. MENA countries otherwise are not known for the overall industrial development and growth. The huge populations of youth and high unemployment in the MENA countries have made it essential to go for overall industrial development. However, considering the fact that the industry and education of any economy should go hand in hand, it has become unavoidable to stress the higher educational development in the MENA countries. The educational institutions that provide business education (popularly known as B-Schools) in the country will have to work with high productivity, inputs wise. This will enable the economy to bridge the industry-academic gap. However, for this, the realistic approach should be the priority to evaluate the B-Schools' productivity. The investments made in B-Schools are always high (infrastructural and financial).

After everything else, the contemporary issues, employee wellness, access, quality, equity, and governance issues in higher education, are dealt. Zutshi, Pogrebnaya, and Fermelis, in “Wellness Programs in Higher Education: An Australian Case,” debate on employee wellness becoming a growing concern for many organizations, as reflected by increased resources allocation in providing Wellness Programs (WPs). This chapter is based on a study conducted in order to develop greater qualitative insights into
employees’ awareness of WPs and their reasons for non-participation, and the findings will assist in constructing appropriate and effective WPs and using the communication methods most likely to be effective. Huq and Huque, in their “Public and Private Higher Education Concerns and Challenges: A Case of Bangladesh,” examine the access, quality, equity, and governance aspects of the education at both public and private universities. They also highlight the obstacles encountered and challenges faced by both private and public universities of the country and provide recommendations in order to sustain nationally and internationally acceptable quality education.

These chapters in the form of case studies can be helpful in application, subject to contextualization as required. Hence, this section is named “Case Studies and Best Practices.”

In sum, the book, *Handbook of Research on Higher Education in the MENA Region: Policy and Practice*, presents a detailed analysis and synthesis of the stream of higher education and provides understanding of this complex and multi-faceted process. It is useful in guiding future research, and it is the first book that gives systematic information about the linkage between higher education policy and practice with a focus on MENA region. If history serves as a guide, future learning institutions will emerge to reflect how a society creates and shares information, communicates important concepts to those new to a field of study, and generates spaces of discourse for disseminating and extending existing boundaries of knowledge. I sincerely hope this enhanced understanding stimulates additional research in these areas. I have learnt a lot from these chapters, and I hope you do as well.

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**REFERENCES**
