

The Development of General Education Policy and Regulation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (A Comparative Study of the 1970 Education Policy Document and the 2026 General Education Law)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the development of general education policy and regulation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by comparing the 1970 Education Policy Document with the 2026 General Education Law. It examined areas of continuity and transformation in educational philosophy and objectives, state responsibility, governance and the distribution of powers, educational stages and pathways, curricula, the rights of students and teachers, quality and evaluation, equity and inclusion, family and community participation, private and nonprofit sector involvement, educational financing and asset management, and oversight and accountability. The study used a descriptive method with analytical and comparative dimensions. The study examined the provisions of both documents within their respective historical and regulatory contexts, classified them into common themes, and analyzed them to identify similarities, differences, continuity, and innovation. The findings revealed that the 1970 document established a comprehensive intellectual and educational framework characterized by a detailed articulation of Islamic foundations and social and educational purposes, as well as a centralized state role in planning, financing, supervision, and educational provision.

Keywords: education policy, General Education Law, educational governance, educational quality, educational financing, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Introduction:

Education is one of the most important strategic sectors in the development of the state and society. It is the means through which values, knowledge, and experience are transmitted across generations; the principal instrument for developing human capital and strengthening national identity; and a primary means of preparing individuals to participate in economic, social, and cultural life (Albeshir, 2025). The effectiveness of an education system is determined not only by what takes place in the classroom, but also by the clarity of its philosophy and objectives, the nature of its institutional structure, the distribution of responsibilities among relevant authorities, the quality of its curricula, teachers, and learning environments, the equity of access to educational opportunities, and the efficiency with which its financing, resources, and assets are managed (Al-Otaibi, 2018; Al-Shahrani, 2022). Formal education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has passed through successive historical stages tied to the state's development and the expansion of its responsibilities (Albeshir, 2025; Al-Ghamdi, 2000). The foundations of modern educational administration began to emerge with the establishment of the Directorate of Education in the Hijaz in 1926, which assumed responsibility for expanding and supervising education. Its responsibilities subsequently extended across the country following the unification of the Kingdom in 1932. This period witnessed the issuance of several early regulations, including the regulation for curriculum standardization in 1927, the Schools Law in 1929, and the Amiri Schools Law in 1939. (Albeshir, 2025) As education expanded, the Directorate of Education became the Ministry of Education in 1953. The Ministry became responsible for establishing educational institutions and providing teachers, curricula, and facilities. In its early years, it also assumed responsibilities related to higher education, including establishing the College of Sharia in Makkah in 1949. The Education Policy Document of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was issued in 1970, when the state was working to establish the education system, expand access, address illiteracy, unify educational foundations, objectives, and curricula, and prepare the human resources required for national development (Albeshir et al., 2026). Consequently, the document was broad in scope, comprising general principles and objectives and detailed provisions on educational stages, teacher preparation, private education, literacy education, curricula and instructional resources, and educational financing. It was not merely an instrument of administrative regulation; rather, it presented an integrated conception of the individual, society, knowledge, and education's role. More than five decades later, the 2026 General Education Law was enacted within a markedly different context characterized by the expansion of the education system and the increasing diversity of its institutions. This context also involved growing attention to quality, efficiency, sustainability, digital transformation, future competencies, beneficiaries' rights, and partnerships with the private and nonprofit sectors (Albeshir et al., 2026). The Law was introduced within the framework of Saudi Vision 2030 and its associated directions to enhance the efficiency of public institutions, improve service quality, develop human capabilities,

diversify the economy, strengthen asset management, and expand the contribution of nongovernmental sectors. A valid comparison between the two documents cannot be based solely on the number of provisions or the degree of textual detail. The 1970 document is a policy framework with a comprehensive intellectual and normative function. In contrast, the 2026 Law is a legislative and regulatory instrument that defines rights, institutional structures, powers, and procedures while referring many details to implementing regulations, controls, and guidelines. Consequently, the absence of a particular detail from the new Law does not necessarily indicate that it has been abandoned. Similarly, the inclusion of a general principle in the earlier document does not mean that the same contemporary procedures and safeguards supported it. This study proceeds from this methodological understanding to trace the development between the two documents, identify the principles that have endured, examine the areas that have been reorganized, and analyze the roles and concepts introduced by the new Law (Albeshir et al., 2026).

Statement of the Problem:

Saudi education has undergone major historical and regulatory transformations that have affected its philosophy, objectives, institutional structure, and the roles of its various stakeholders (Albeshir, 2025; Albeshir et al., 2026). The 1970 Education Policy Document served as the comprehensive framework that guided education for many decades. It affirmed the Islamic foundations of education, the state's responsibility, and the provision of free education, while providing detailed guidance on the objectives of educational stages, curricula, teacher preparation, the regulation of private education, and educational financing. By contrast, the 2026 General Education Law introduced a new statutory framework based on clearly defined structures, powers, rights, and obligations; stronger quality assurance, evaluation, and accountability; and expanded partnerships, investment opportunities, and asset management arrangements. This transition highlights the need for a comprehensive comparative study to examine the relationship between the two documents and determine whether the new Law continues the previous policy, reformulates its objectives, or transforms the philosophy and mechanisms governing education. It is also necessary to distinguish between differences arising from changes in historical context, differences attributable to the distinct nature of each document, and substantive transformations in the distribution of roles and powers and in the mechanisms of regulation, financing, and evaluation. Accordingly, the research problem is expressed in the following main question:

What developments, similarities, and differences can be identified in the policy and regulation of general education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through a comparison of the 1970 Education Policy Document and the 2026 General Education Law?

Objectives of the Study:

The study seeks to identify the foundations and reference frameworks governing education in the two documents; analyze the development of educational objectives

and outcomes; compare state responsibility, institutional structures, and the distribution of powers; and identify transformations in the regulation of educational stages, curricula, teachers, students, quality, and inclusion. It also seeks to analyze the development of family and community participation and the involvement of the private and nonprofit sectors, and to compare educational financing, asset management, oversight, and accountability. Ultimately, the study aims to interpret the transition from a policy document designed to guide the development of the education system to a statutory framework governing a large, multi-stakeholder educational system.

Previous studies:

Al-Munqash (2006) conducted a study entitled “An Analytical Study of Education Policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Proposals for Its Development.” The study aimed to analyze the Education Policy Document issued by the Supreme Committee for Education Policy in 1390 AH/1970, examine the extent to which it aligned with prominent international standards and general trends in education policy, evaluate the accuracy with which its provisions were formulated and the extent to which they were implemented in educational practice, and ultimately develop proposals for its improvement. The study collected, summarized, and classified the most prominent international standards and general trends in education policy and then compared them with the provisions of the Education Policy Document to determine the extent to which they were incorporated. It also reviewed the literature on education policy formulation and implementation to assess the soundness of the document’s provisions and their level of implementation. The study reached several findings, most notably that the Education Policy Document was developed more than thirty-four years earlier and has not undergone substantial amendment or development in response to the transformations and challenges experienced by Saudi society and the wider world, particularly in education. It also identified problems in the linguistic structure of certain provisions, indicating the need to reformulate them to make them clearer, more understandable, and applicable. The findings further showed that the document’s content was not fully aligned with international standards and general trends in education policy, requiring the addition of certain aspects and greater emphasis on others. Regarding implementation, some provisions had not been implemented, others had been implemented below the required level, whereas still others had been successfully implemented. In light of these findings, the study proposed amendments and improvements to better align the document with international standards and contemporary trends in education policy.

Al-Shahwan (2012) conducted a study entitled “The Education Policy Document in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from the Perspective of Educational Supervisors.” The study aimed to identify educational supervisors’ views regarding the provisions of the Education Policy Document and examine whether their perspectives differed

according to the study variables. The study problem was expressed in the following main question: What are educational supervisors' views of the Education Policy Document in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia? The study employed the descriptive method and used a questionnaire consisting of 34 items distributed across seven dimensions. The instrument's validity was established through face validity by presenting it to expert reviewers and through internal validity by calculating correlation coefficients. The questionnaire dimensions also demonstrated acceptable reliability coefficients. The instrument was administered to 85 educational supervisors who had enrolled in training courses during the academic years 1425/1426 AH and 1426/1427 AH. The findings showed that participants' attitudes toward the provisions of the Education Policy Document were strong, with an overall mean response of approximately 3.5. The study also revealed statistically significant differences in educational supervisors' responses attributable to the type of academic qualification, age, and professional experience in education. The study recommended preserving the doctrinal principles contained in the Education Policy Document and emphasizing them across education policies, while broadening the participation of community institutions and organizations in formulating national education policy. It also recommended focusing on the quality and characteristics of educational outcomes, establishing clear standards for their evaluation, periodically analyzing education policy, and updating its objectives and goals in response to regional and global changes.

Al-Subhi et al. (2025) conducted a study entitled "The Education Policy Document in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Achievement of Sustainable Development: An Analytical Study." The study aimed to determine the extent to which the Saudi Education Policy Document incorporated provisions defining educational directions in light of the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. It employed the descriptive-analytical method using content analysis. The study produced a set of quantitative and qualitative findings. The dimensions of sustainable development appeared a total of 95 times in the document, mostly implicitly. The social dimension ranked first, with 64 occurrences representing 67%, followed by the economic dimension with 28 occurrences representing 30%, while the environmental dimension ranked third and last, with only three occurrences representing 3%. The qualitative findings also showed that the Education Policy Document accorded appropriate attention to the social dimension compared with the economic and environmental dimensions, as 68 of the document's provisions were associated with it. In contrast, the findings revealed limited attention to the environmental dimension, with references confined to statements contained in only three provisions and no clear inclusion of important indicators such as environmental conservation, the utilization of renewable and clean energy sources, the promotion of environmental awareness, and protection against disasters and environmental risks, among other indicators associated with sustainable development. In light of these findings, the study recommended updating the Education Policy Document in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and incorporating indicators of sustainable development in

education to enable it to keep pace with global transformations and contemporary developments.

Albeshir et al. (2026) conducted a study entitled “The Evolution of General Education Governance in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: A Comparative Study of the 1970 Education Policy Document and the 2026 General Education Law.” The study aimed to examine the evolution of general education governance and identify the similarities and differences between the two documents. It employed the comparative descriptive-analytical method by analyzing and comparing the provisions of the two documents across several areas, including organizational structures, distribution of authority, decision-making, quality and evaluation, oversight and accountability, the rights of students and teachers, and the participation of the private and nonprofit sectors. The findings showed that the 1970 Education Policy Document implicitly incorporated certain governance principles, including state responsibility for financing, supervising, and providing education and regulating private education. Nevertheless, it was characterized by centralization and an emphasis on general principles and goals. In contrast, the 2026 General Education Law provided a clearer and more detailed governance framework by specifying structures, responsibilities, and procedures and strengthening delegation, coordination, external evaluation, school accreditation, and accountability. The new law also expanded the regulation of students’ and teachers’ rights and obligations, violations and penalties, the right to appeal, and the participation of the private and nonprofit sectors in providing educational services, while maintaining the state’s responsibility for providing free public education.

Albeshir et al. (2026) conducted a study entitled “The Evolution of Private and Nonprofit Sector Participation in General Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: A Comparative Study of the 1970 Education Policy Document and the 2026 General Education Law.” The study aimed to analyze the evolution of private and nonprofit sector participation in general education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by comparing the 1970 Education Policy Document with the 2026 General Education Law. It employed the descriptive method in its analytical and comparative forms by analyzing the provisions related to private education and community participation in the earlier document and comparing them with the provisions regulating participation and investment in the new law. The findings revealed a transition in the role of nongovernmental actors from supplementary private education subject to government supervision to broad institutional partnerships encompassing governance, investment, service provision, management and operation, and the utilization of educational assets. The new law also explicitly recognized the nonprofit sector, permitted foreign investment, expanded forms of support and incentives, and strengthened requirements related to quality, accreditation, accountability, and the protection of students’ rights. The study concluded that this transformation did not represent a withdrawal of the state or the full privatization of education, but rather a redistribution of certain roles while the state retained responsibility for ensuring the provision, equity, and quality of free public education. It recommended establishing an integrated regulatory

framework for partnerships and linking empowerment to performance and quality indicators.

Benefits Derived from Previous Studies:

Previous studies helped establish the scholarly background of the current study and clarify the historical and regulatory development of general education policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They also helped identify the key strengths of the 1970 Education Policy Document, areas requiring further development, and the extent of its alignment with international standards, sustainable development, and contemporary societal transformations. In addition, these studies informed the identification of key concepts, the selection of the descriptive approach in its analytical and comparative forms, and the development of the comparison dimensions, particularly educational foundations and objectives, governance and the distribution of responsibilities, quality and evaluation, the rights of students and teachers, private and nonprofit sector participation, financing, and asset management. Their findings also helped interpret the transition from a policy document characterized by an intellectual and directive orientation focused on general principles and goals to a law that provides greater detail on structures, responsibilities, procedures, rights, and accountability. This study differs from previous studies by comprehensively comparing the 1970 Education Policy Document and the 2026 General Education Law, rather than focusing on a single area, thereby providing an integrated understanding of the evolution of education policy and regulation in the Kingdom.

Methodology:

The study employed the descriptive method in its analytical and comparative dimensions. It analyzed the provisions of the 1970 Education Policy Document and the 2026 General Education Law, grouped them into common themes, and compared their content to identify similarities, differences, continuity, and innovation. The comparison was not based solely on literal or terminological correspondence. Rather, it examined the functions performed by the relevant provisions, the historical context of each document, and their respective levels of legal authority and detail. The unit of analysis was the article or statutory paragraph associated with each theme. A holistic reading of both documents was also employed to ensure that individual provisions were not interpreted in isolation from their broader philosophical and regulatory contexts.

1: The Nature of the Two Documents and Their Historical Context

The 1970 Education Policy Document was issued during a formative period in which the education system was expanding rapidly. At that time, the state needed a comprehensive framework that brought together Islamic beliefs, national identity, and development objectives, while directing educational authorities toward unified goals. The document was therefore organized into several parts and chapters covering the

foundations and aims of education; the objectives of the various educational stages; higher and technical education; teacher preparation; private education; literacy education; curricula and instructional resources; and the dissemination and financing of knowledge. Its discourse was predominantly normative and value-oriented, employing expressions relating to the state's responsibility to support, encourage, provide, and supervise education. It also articulated the desired characteristics of the individual, the school, and society.

By contrast, the 2026 General Education Law was issued after education had developed into a vast system comprising millions of students, thousands of institutions, public, private, and nonprofit sectors, and specialized bodies responsible for curricula, evaluation, and accreditation. It therefore focused on legally regulating the relationships among these stakeholders. The Law defined key terms; specified the composition and responsibilities of the General Education Affairs Council; delineated the powers of the Ministry and education departments; regulated private educational institutions; and addressed the rights of students and teachers, school buildings and facilities, violations, and penalties. The difference is evident in the very structure of the two texts. The 1970 document primarily sought to answer the question: What kind of individual and society should education seek to develop? The 2026 Law added an institutional question: Who makes decisions, who implements them, what rights and obligations apply, how is quality measured, and how is accountability ensured? The Law should therefore not be viewed as a complete intellectual substitute for the earlier document. Rather, it represents a transition from a broad normative framework to institutional and procedural regulation.

2: Islamic Foundations and National Identity

The Islamic foundation occupied a central position in the 1970 Education Policy Document. Article 1 stipulated that education policy derives from Islam, which the nation embraces as a faith, an act of worship, a moral code, a body of law, a system of governance, and a comprehensive way of life. Article 2 linked education to belief in Allah as Lord, Islam as the true religion, and Muhammad—peace and blessings be upon him—as Prophet and Messenger. Article 3 further affirmed the comprehensive Islamic conception of the universe, humanity, and life, emphasizing that all existence is governed by the laws ordained by Allah. Subsequent articles elaborated on the role of education in strengthening faith and morality, fulfilling servitude to Allah, connecting knowledge with action, and developing Muslim individuals who are capable of contributing to the development of the world and serving their communities. The document did not separate national belonging from Islamic affiliation. Article 17 emphasized the unity and solidarity of the Muslim nation, while Article 18 connected learners with the history and civilization of the Muslim nation and encouraged them to benefit from the lives of its prominent figures. The objectives of the different educational stages also included instilling love of the homeland, loyalty to the country's leadership, and commitment to community service. Identity

was thus presented as a set of integrated circles beginning with faith and extending to the Muslim nation, the homeland, and society.

The 2026 General Education Law preserved this foundation, although it expressed it more concisely. Article 2(1) stipulated the inculcation of Islamic beliefs and values derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah, together with pride in religion and national belonging. Article 2 also addressed students' religious, national, moral, scientific, cultural, and skills-based development, linking education to the strengthening of national identity and social responsibility. This demonstrates substantive continuity in the foundations of education, despite a change in presentation. The 1970 document explained the theological and philosophical foundations in considerable detail, whereas the new Law affirmed these foundations within its statement of educational objectives and left their elaboration to curricula, policies, and implementation guidelines. This brevity should not be interpreted as a weakening of the Islamic foundation; rather, it reflects the different nature of the two texts. A law establishes binding principles, whereas a policy document explains their philosophical basis and educational implications. The 2026 Law also broadened the language associated with contemporary citizenship. It combined pride in religion and national belonging with legal, economic, environmental, and technological literacy, as well as responsible engagement with society and the wider world. Identity thus became a framework that preserves established principles while simultaneously preparing learners to engage with transformations in knowledge, the economy, and technology.

3: Educational Objectives and the Profile of the Learner

The 1970 document presented a comprehensive profile of the learner: a person of faith and sound moral character who takes pride in religion, the Muslim nation, and the homeland, and who is capable of productive work and assuming responsibility. Article 11 established a relationship between religious and natural sciences, while Article 12 emphasized directing science and knowledge toward serving the faith and building society. Article 14 connected knowledge with practical application and regarded both as means of achieving cultural, social, economic, and health development. Article 15 stipulated that education at all levels should be aligned with the state's general development plan, while Article 16 emphasized informed engagement with global civilizational developments in science, culture, and literature. This demonstrates that the document was not confined to religious and moral exhortation. Rather, it combined the development of faith and character with intellectual growth, preparation for employment, and responsiveness to development needs. It also specified the objectives of each educational stage. Primary education was viewed as the foundation for acquiring faith, language, and basic skills; intermediate education was associated with developing students' abilities and preparing them for life; and secondary education was intended to complete students' personal development and prepare them for further study or employment. By comparison, the 2026 Law formulated educational objectives in language that places clearer emphasis on learning outcomes and future competencies. Article 2(6)

stipulated that students should acquire scientific, environmental, cultural, social, legal, economic, civilizational, and technological knowledge and skills, linking these competencies to future developments and requirements. Article 2(8) emphasized developing communication, creative and critical thinking, logical analysis, and problem-solving skills. Articles 2(9) and 2(10), meanwhile, addressed lifelong learning, research, innovation, invention, and engagement with emerging technologies. This reflects a shift from broadly describing the development of a virtuous and productive individual to identifying a set of competencies that can be translated into curricula, indicators, and measurable learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the Law did not abandon values-based development; instead, it combined such development with future-oriented skills. The difference between the two documents is therefore not a distinction between values and skills, but rather one of detail and the language used to describe educational outcomes. The earlier document emphasized overarching educational purposes, whereas the new Law focuses on religious, national, scientific, and skills-based outcomes that can be regulated and measured.

4: State Responsibility and the Right to Education

The 1970 Education Policy Document was founded on the state's central responsibility to lead, finance, and expand education. This responsibility is evident in the provisions that assign the state the duty of developing curricula; providing schools, teachers, instructional resources, libraries, and healthcare services; and encouraging and supervising private education. Article 229 identified human capacity as the foundation of development, while Article 230 called for increasing the proportion of the state budget allocated to education to meet growing needs. Article 233 further stipulated that education should be free at all levels and in all forms and that the state should not charge tuition fees. The 2026 Law reaffirmed this responsibility in more explicit rights-based and regulatory terms. Article 3(1) established general education as a right for all, while Article 3(2) stipulated that it should be provided free of charge in public educational institutions. Article 13(1) also required the Ministry to take the necessary measures to ensure the provision of general education throughout all regions of the Kingdom. Defining education as a right adds a statutory dimension to the principle of free education: education is not merely a service provided by the state subject to available capacity, but a right whose accessibility the state is legally obligated to guarantee. The comparison shows the state's continued public role despite the expansion of partnerships. The 2026 Law did not transfer primary responsibility for education to the market or private institutions. Rather, it preserved free public education and the Ministry's responsibility for ensuring its provision. What is new is that the state is no longer required to perform all financing, construction, and operational functions directly. The Law permits certain functions to be assigned to other entities, allows some institutions to be managed or operated by external providers, and enables partnerships relating to educational buildings and assets, while the state retains its regulatory, supervisory, quality-assurance, and oversight responsibilities. The transformation should therefore

not be characterized as a withdrawal of the state, but rather as a redefinition of how it fulfills its responsibilities. Under the earlier model, the state predominantly served as the financier, planner, provider, and operator. Under the new Law, it remains the guarantor, regulator, financier, and provider, but may contract with other entities to perform certain construction or operational functions without relinquishing its obligation to uphold the right to education.

5: Governance and Institutional Structure

The 1970 document contained implicit governance principles, including state responsibility, planning, supervision, regulation of private education, and evaluation of the educational process. Article 231 called for the establishment of a Supreme Council for Education to oversee education in its various forms and stages, as well as the means of cultural development and guidance. It further stipulated that the Council's governing regulations should define its powers, responsibilities, and operating procedures. The document, however, did not provide details concerning the Council's composition, meeting procedures, decision-making mechanisms, or relationship with executive bodies. Broad references to the state and the competent educational authorities remained the prevailing formulation. By contrast, the 2026 Law made institutional structure a central component of the education system. Article 7 regulated the composition of the General Education Affairs Council, chaired by the Minister and comprising representatives of relevant authorities and four experienced specialists. Pursuant to paragraph 10, the Council includes two representatives from the private and nonprofit sectors. Article 8 specified the Council's functions, including approving plans, policies, and strategies related to general education; regulating private educational institutions, specialized centers, and virtual institutions; and approving regulations and controls relating to students, teachers, and educational buildings. Article 9 regulated the Council's operating procedures by specifying the frequency of meetings, quorum requirements, majority voting, the possibility of holding meetings and voting remotely, and the adoption of resolutions by circulation. Articles 10 and 11 addressed the Secretary-General, the General Secretariat, and its operating budget. Article 12 specified the Secretariat's responsibilities, including preparing studies and draft regulations, providing data, organizing meetings, communicating and monitoring the implementation of decisions, and coordinating with government agencies. In contrast to the Council's strategic and regulatory role, Article 13 designated the Ministry as the authority responsible for supervising general education and educational institutions and defined its executive and regulatory functions. Article 14 also authorized the Minister to delegate certain Ministry powers to education departments. It granted the Ministry the authority to establish, merge, separate, or abolish education departments and their offices, as well as to form committees and advisory councils. This reflects a transition from implicit governance to explicit institutional governance. The new Law does not merely assign oversight to a supreme council or competent authority; it specifies institutional composition, powers, procedures, and the relationship between decision-making and

implementation. Nevertheless, it does not establish complete decentralization. Fundamental powers remain vested in the Council and the Ministry, while the delegation of authority to education departments is subject to ministerial decisions and governing controls. The model may therefore be described as structured centralization that allows for delegation, participation, and coordination, rather than granting full autonomy to local units or schools.

6: Educational Stages, Pathways, and Compulsory Education

The 1970 document provided extensive detail on the objectives and content of the various educational stages. It addressed nurseries and kindergartens; primary, intermediate, and secondary education; higher and technical education; teacher preparation; literacy and adult education; and the education of persons with disabilities. This level of detail reflected the need to establish a progressive education system in which each stage had clearly defined objectives and a distinct role in the individual's development. The 2026 Law, however, regulates the stages of general education within a more flexible framework and links them to the age of admission, compulsory education, and the respective powers of the Council and the Ministry. Article 8 empowers the Council to approve the age of admission and submit recommendations concerning the duration of compulsory education. Under Article 13, the Ministry is responsible for establishing schools, classes, and specialized pathways, as well as creating, merging, separating, or closing public educational institutions as needed. The difference lies in the fact that the earlier document offered an educational description of the objectives of each stage, whereas the new Law focuses on the regulatory authority responsible for establishing, modifying, and administering educational stages and pathways. This approach provides greater flexibility in responding to demographic and technological changes and labor-market needs, as operational details can be determined through regulations, decisions, and national frameworks instead of being permanently fixed in the text of the Law. The new Law also reflects a move toward diversifying educational pathways and models rather than confining education to the traditional school setting. It regulates virtual institutions and specialized centers, permits international programs in private institutions under Article 28, and allows different and innovative educational models under Article 32. The concept of an educational pathway has therefore expanded from the division of education into stages and branches to encompass greater diversity in content, modes of learning, governance, and operation.

7: Curricula, Textbooks, and Educational Programs

The 1970 document devoted considerable attention to curricula. Article 206 stipulated that the state should give due attention to curricula as an essential means of education and instruction. Article 207 identified the defining characteristics of the curriculum, requiring it to derive from Islam, the essential foundations of the nation, and the principles of its system; respond to societal needs; enable learners to attain the required educational standards and objectives; maintain balance and flexibility;

accommodate differences among environments and circumstances; and remain appropriate to students' levels. Article 208 broadened the concept of curriculum to encompass its overarching aim and relationship with the objectives of the state; the specific objectives of each educational stage and subject; academic standards, practical skills, and intellectual and moral orientations; guidance for teachers in curriculum implementation; school activities; the objectives of instructional units; and the assessment of student progress. Article 209 required textbooks to be consistent with Islamic principles, linguistically sound, and able to fulfill curriculum objectives. Article 210 called for establishing a systematic process for textbook planning and development, while Article 211 emphasized the importance of teacher guides.

The 2026 Law redistributed curriculum responsibilities among several entities. Article 27 stipulated that the Ministry of Education, the Education and Training Evaluation Commission, and the National Curriculum Center should jointly develop the National Curriculum Framework for General Education. This represents a transition from assigning curricular responsibility broadly to the competent educational authorities toward a collaborative model bringing together the implementing authority, the evaluation authority, and the specialized national curriculum body. Article 28 also permitted the adoption of international educational programs in private institutions, subject to the Ministry's requirements and supervision. Under Article 32, the Law allowed the licensing of educational models that differ in their content, methods, or management, thereby creating space for innovation while retaining governmental approval and oversight. This regulatory approach combines the unity of the national framework with controlled diversity in educational programs and models. From a comparative perspective, the 1970 document provides greater detail regarding the educational characteristics of curricula and textbooks, whereas the 2026 Law offers greater clarity concerning curriculum governance and the distribution of responsibilities. The Law preserves the national frame of reference while introducing opportunities for international programs and innovation and connecting curricula more closely with evaluation, accreditation, and future competencies. Curriculum governance has thus shifted from regulating curricular content and its constituent elements to establishing a national framework jointly developed by specialized bodies and capable of accommodating diverse educational models.

8: Teachers and the Management of the Teaching Profession

The 1970 Education Policy Document regarded the teacher as central to the educational process and as a role model for students. Article 169 called for establishing a special professional framework for teachers that would enhance their status and support their retention in the teaching profession. Article 170 affirmed that teacher training should be a continuous process and called for a plan to train unqualified teachers. Article 195 further required those working in education to possess scientific, pedagogical, and technical competence, as well as sound Islamic character. Articles 196–198 regulated training, refresher, and orientation courses and addressed their objectives, curricula, and evaluation. The document therefore

associated teacher quality with three dimensions: scientific and pedagogical competence, moral character and exemplary conduct, and continuous professional development. It also recognized the importance of making the profession attractive through dedicated career structures and benefits, particularly in institutions responsible for teacher preparation.

The 2026 Law moved toward defining the teacher's statutory professional status through a clear framework of rights and obligations. Article 44 stipulated the provision of specialized professional programs to develop teachers' skills and capabilities. Article 48 defined teachers' rights, including access to an appropriate educational environment; professional training and development encompassing modern technologies and interactive teaching methods; participation in educational development; and incentives in recognition of outstanding performance. Article 49, in turn, defined teachers' obligations. These include adherence to curricula and policies; consideration of students' characteristics, abilities, and individual differences; ensuring fairness; fostering creativity and innovation; observing professional ethics; continuously developing their knowledge and improving their performance; and participating in training programs, research, and studies. This reflects a transition from portraying the teacher primarily as a qualified professional with an educational mission who should be properly prepared and supported, to regulating a comprehensive professional relationship that defines rights, duties, participation, incentives, and accountability. The Law does not eliminate the ethical and vocational dimensions of teaching; rather, it adds an enforceable rights-based and professional dimension. Article 48(3), which enables teachers to contribute to educational development and provide their professional perspectives, also shifts their role from merely implementing the curriculum to serving as professional partners in educational improvement.

9: Students and Their Rights and Obligations

The 1970 document addressed students from the perspective of care and comprehensive development. Its provisions relating to the different educational stages emphasized students' psychological, intellectual, physical, and social needs. Article 54 called for identifying individual differences to improve educational guidance and help students develop according to their abilities, aptitudes, and interests. Article 55 emphasized supporting academically underachieving students and addressing the causes of their difficulties, while Article 57 focused on identifying and nurturing gifted students. The document also addressed healthcare, guidance, extracurricular activities, human dignity, moral development, and a sense of belonging. However, these rights were dispersed throughout the document as principles and obligations placed on the state and schools. They were not consolidated into a statutory list specifying students' rights, obligations, and protection mechanisms. The 2026 Law addressed this matter explicitly in Article 38, which defined students' rights, including access to education in a safe environment, protection from abuse, the right to have their complaints heard, healthcare, access to educational records and

certificates, and fair treatment. In return, students are required to attend regularly, demonstrate diligence and commitment, respect teachers and fellow students, protect property, and comply with applicable rules and regulations. Article 61 further guaranteed that students' educational progress and rights should not be adversely affected by violations committed by a private educational institution. This constitutes an important safeguard that separates the institution's liability from the student's right to education. Article 65 also required educational institutions to report cases of assault or abuse, thereby strengthening preventive protection and formal intervention. Students have thus moved from being primarily recipients of care and education to being recognized as stakeholders with a defined legal status, rights, obligations, and safeguards. This does not imply that student care was absent from the earlier document. Rather, it indicates a shift in how such care is expressed and enforced. Under the earlier document, student care constituted a value and policy commitment; under the new Law, it has become a right linked to procedures, responsibilities, and accountability.

10: Equity, Inclusion, and Individual Differences

The 1970 document established an early foundation for educational equity through free education, the expansion of schools, consideration of individual differences, support for academically underachieving and gifted students, education for persons with disabilities, and literacy initiatives. Article 54 emphasized the identification of individual differences, Article 55 addressed academic underachievement, and Article 57 focused on supporting gifted students. Articles 180–187 addressed literacy and adult education, while Article 185 encouraged individuals and groups to participate in literacy efforts. Article 186 also required private schools to contribute their share to this responsibility. Articles 188 and subsequent provisions addressed special education for persons with disabilities. They affirmed the state's responsibility for educating these individuals according to their capabilities and for developing cultural and vocational curricula suited to their abilities and circumstances. Although the language of that period tended to frame the matter in terms of special care, the document nevertheless established the state's responsibility to provide appropriate education and ensure that these groups were not excluded from opportunities for development.

The 2026 Law, by contrast, regulates inclusion within a framework of rights and institutional regulations. Article 8 authorizes the General Education Affairs Council to approve regulations governing the education of students with disabilities and gifted students. Article 37 links the educational environment to health, safety, international standards, and access to technological and innovative resources. Article 49(2) also requires teachers to consider students' characteristics, abilities, and individual differences, ensure fairness, and foster creativity. The development lies in the transition from a model of care based on dedicated programs, classes, and curricula to the construction of an inclusive system governed by rights, regulations, and standards, while retaining the need for specialized arrangements according to the nature of a

student's disability or giftedness. The requirement under Article 13(1) to provide education throughout all regions of the Kingdom adds a geographical dimension to educational equity. Electronic education and virtual institutions also create additional opportunities for access, provided that the digital divide is adequately addressed. Overall, both documents uphold the principle that differences in students' abilities and circumstances should not prevent them from learning. The new Law, however, situates this principle within a broader rights-based and regulatory framework. Nevertheless, the success of educational inclusion ultimately depends on the adequacy of regulations, funding, personnel, and facilities, rather than solely on the existence of statutory provisions.

11: Quality, Evaluation, and Accreditation

Although the 1970 document did not use the concept of quality in its contemporary sense, it incorporated many of its essential components across various provisions. It established clear requirements for curricula, textbooks, teachers, buildings, and instructional resources. Article 179(a) required private education to maintain a standard no lower than that of public schools. Article 212 stipulated that examinations should measure the extent to which students had attained the knowledge, experiences, and skills specified in the curriculum, while ensuring accuracy, integrity, and sound procedures. Article 213 called for assessments measuring abilities, talents, interests, and aptitudes. Article 214 emphasized evaluating the educational process in all its dimensions, including curricula, teachers, textbooks, teaching methods, and approaches to pedagogical supervision. These provisions reveal a relatively advanced conception of evaluation that extends beyond student grades to encompass the various components of the educational process. Evaluation, however, remained largely internal to the education system and under the supervision of the competent educational authorities. The document did not provide for school accreditation, independent external evaluation, international assessments, or the publication of performance indicators. The 2026 Law made quality an explicit objective from Article 2 onward, linking the regulation of general education to quality and effective performance. Article 30 represents a major turning point. It requires educational institutions to administer national and international assessments and measures implemented by the Education and Training Evaluation Commission. It also requires private educational institutions to obtain school accreditation from the Commission or from an international body recognized by it. The Ministry is responsible for monitoring compliance and providing the Commission with the necessary data. Article 13 also assigns the Ministry responsibility for developing organizational and procedural guidelines, including guidance relating to supervision, student evaluation, safety, and educational continuity. Article 37 links the educational environment to international standards designed to ensure the quality of performance and practice. Article 51 establishes standards and specifications for educational buildings and environmental sustainability, while Article 53 addresses equipment, services, and technological infrastructure. The principal development is the transition from a set of

requirements dispersed across educational inputs and processes to an institutional quality-assurance system comprising objectives, standards, guidelines, national and international assessments, external accreditation, data, and monitoring. A relative separation has also emerged between the entities that provide education and the authority responsible for evaluating its quality, thereby strengthening the objectivity of evaluation and accountability. At the same time, the Law preserves traditional elements of quality, such as teacher competence and the suitability of curricula and facilities, while adding outcome quality, future competencies, and external measurement.

12: Family, Community, and Educational Participation

The 1970 Education Policy Document recognized the importance of the relationship between schools, families, and communities, although provisions concerning participation were dispersed throughout the document rather than organized within a unified framework. Its educational objectives were linked to community service, while Article 185 encouraged individuals and groups to contribute to literacy and adult education under the supervision of the competent authorities. The document also viewed the school as a social environment in which students learn cooperation and responsibility and connected curricula and activities with community needs. The 2026 Law, by contrast, stipulated in Article 50 that the Ministry should establish regulations to strengthen partnerships between educational institutions and families and enable parents to participate in achieving educational objectives. This provision transforms family participation from a desirable practice into a regulated field requiring clear mechanisms for communication, participation, and responsibility. Article 52(3) also permits educational institutions to be used outside regular school hours, thereby expanding their community role and enabling them to host training and awareness programs and cultural and sports activities. The representation of the private and nonprofit sectors on the General Education Affairs Council under Article 7(10) provides an additional channel for incorporating community and economic expertise into educational governance. The shift is therefore from participation as a voluntary contribution to a specific activity, such as literacy education, toward a multilevel partnership involving families, communities, and the private and nonprofit sectors. However, broader participation requires clearly defined roles to prevent unregulated interference. It also requires equitable arrangements to ensure that schools located in more affluent communities are not the only ones to benefit from additional resources and partnerships.

13: Private Education and the Private and Nonprofit Sectors

The 1970 document regulated nongovernmental education under the designation of private education. Article 175 stipulated that the state should encourage private education at all levels while subjecting it to technical and administrative supervision. Article 176 restricted the licensing of private schools and institutes to Saudi nationals—a restriction concerning licensing and ownership rather than student

nationality. Article 177 referred the conditions and obligations governing private education to a separate law, while Article 178 prohibited private institutions from independently awarding public certificates. Article 179 defined the objectives of state supervision. It required the educational and health standards of private schools to be no lower than those of public schools and stipulated that their educational orientation should conform to Islamic principles. It also permitted financial assistance to promote fairness and balance among schools, together with the provision of technical support. Article 185 encouraged individuals and groups to participate in literacy initiatives, while Article 186 linked subsidies for private schools to their contribution to these efforts. The 2026 Law moved beyond the concept of locally owned private education toward a broader institutional framework. Article 1 defines a private educational institution as an institution owned by the private or nonprofit sector and licensed by the Ministry. Article 7(10) grants both sectors representation on the General Education Affairs Council. Article 31 allows these sectors, including foreign investors, to participate in providing and expanding educational services, improving performance and outcomes, and offering diverse operational choices and models. Articles 32 and 33 regulate licensing, reasoned administrative decisions, the right of appeal, transfers of ownership or licenses, and changes to institutional names, locations, or educational stages. Article 34(1) permits the provision of financial, in-kind, developmental, or human-resource support to private institutions. Article 34(2) allows certain Ministry functions or the management and operation of some institutions to be assigned to the private or nonprofit sector. Article 34(3) permits land or buildings to be assigned to these sectors for management, operation, or investment. Article 36 further encourages participation, investment, and the establishment of private educational institutions. These provisions demonstrate a transition in the role of nongovernmental entities from providing parallel education under state supervision to participating in institutional partnerships encompassing governance, service provision, management, operation, investment, and asset utilization. The nonprofit sector is also explicitly recognized as a distinct sector, whereas its presence in the earlier document was implicit in references to contributions by individuals and groups. Foreign investment is now permitted, in contrast to the previous restriction of ownership to Saudi nationals. Alongside this empowerment, the Law emphasizes licensing, accreditation, regulated fees, penalties, and student protection, confirming that greater participation does not amount to an unrestricted liberalization of the education market.

14: Educational Financing and Support for Beneficiaries

The 1970 document was based on the principle that human development is the foundation of broader development. Article 229 stipulated that human capacity is the starting point for utilizing all other resources and that investment in people through education constitutes the basis of comprehensive development. Article 230 called for increasing the proportion of the state budget allocated to education to meet the country's growing educational needs and linked the growth of educational

expenditure to the expansion of the general budget. Article 233 established free education, while Articles 234 and 235 regulated stipends and financial assistance for students in certain forms of education and training. The determination and periodic review of these benefits were linked to educational priorities, diligence, and good conduct. Article 179 also authorized financial assistance to private schools to promote fairness and balance, while Article 186 linked the continuation of such subsidies to their contribution to literacy initiatives. These provisions reveal the predominance of public financing, supplemented by subsidies and stipends designed to expand enrollment, influence educational demand, and encourage private institutions to serve public objectives. The 2026 Law preserved free public education under Article 3 and retained the payment of subsidies and stipends among the Ministry's functions under Article 13. However, it broadened the range of financing instruments. Article 8(7) authorizes the Council to approve regulations governing the acceptance of donations and subsidies by private institutions, as well as regulations governing the Ministry's provision of financial, in-kind, or human-resource support. Article 34(1) reinforces this approach by adding developmental support and incentives, in coordination with the competent financial authorities. Article 14 also permits the establishment of school funds in public schools and education departments, providing a regulated mechanism for supporting local programs and needs. Article 35 regulates tuition fees in private institutions by requiring the Ministry to develop fee criteria and submit them to the Council for approval, while allowing institutions to determine and adjust their fees within those criteria. The transformation lies in the transition from a model based primarily on the public budget, stipends, and subsidies to a multi-instrument model that includes school funds, donations, financial, in-kind, developmental, and human-resource support, regulated tuition fees, and partnerships. These sources nevertheless remain complementary to state responsibility rather than substitutes for it. School funds and donations must also be effectively governed to prevent conflicts of interest or disparities among schools, while support should be linked to performance, need, and educational impact.

15: Buildings, Facilities, and Asset Management

The 1970 document approached buildings and facilities from the perspective of providing an environment conducive to education. Article 201 called for the provision of visual, audio, and training resources. Article 202 emphasized the establishment of school and classroom libraries and the provision of reference and other learning resources. Article 203 required school buildings to meet appropriate standards, satisfy health requirements, and adequately serve educational purposes. Article 204 addressed the inclusion of a mosque in school buildings, while Article 205 focused on healthcare. This approach was appropriate to a period of rapid expansion, when the priority was to establish, equip, and ensure the suitability of schools. The document did not address the asset life cycle, methods of financing or investing in assets, or the outsourcing of their operation. Nor did it use the concept of asset management in its contemporary economic and strategic sense. The 2026 Law elevated asset

management to a broader level. Article 13 granted the Ministry the authority to invest in educational assets and properties. Article 51 stipulated the development of standards and specifications for educational buildings in a manner that promotes environmental sustainability and provides an appropriate educational environment. Article 53(1) emphasized the provision of equipment, services, and instructional resources, including the core technological infrastructure required for electronic education. Article 52(1) permits public educational institutions and education departments to secure buildings through construction, purchase, or lease. It also allows institutions to be constructed and owned through contractual arrangements with the private sector or foreign investors. Article 52(2) allows certain Ministry functions relating to public institutions, or the operation of those institutions, to be assigned to the private sector. Article 52(3) permits educational institutions to be used outside regular school hours. Article 34(3) complements these provisions by allowing land or buildings to be assigned to the private or nonprofit sector, including foreign investors, for the management, operation, or investment of private educational institutions. Educational assets are therefore no longer viewed solely as buildings provided by the state, but as strategic resources that may be secured through multiple arrangements, used more efficiently, and managed or operated with the participation of specialized entities. This transformation is not without challenges. It requires value-for-money assessments, transparent contracting, protection of public property, clear allocation of maintenance responsibilities and risks, and safeguards to ensure that investment does not disrupt educational functions or undermine equity. The purpose of asset management should not be limited to maximizing revenue; rather, it should maximize educational and social value throughout the asset's life cycle.

16: The Educational Environment, Technology, and Digital Transformation

The 1970 document addressed the educational technologies available at the time. Article 201 emphasized visual, audio, and training resources, while Article 202 addressed libraries, references, and learning resources. These provisions demonstrate an awareness that effective education cannot depend solely on lecturing or textbooks, but requires diverse tools and sources of knowledge. The 2026 Law broadened the concept of the educational environment to encompass technological infrastructure, innovation, and sustainability. Article 37 emphasized the provision of a healthy and safe environment that complies with international standards and provides technological and innovative resources capable of strengthening students' skills. Article 53(1) expressly referred to the core technological infrastructure required for electronic education. The Law also included virtual institutions within the Council's regulatory powers under Article 8, while Article 2 emphasized engagement with emerging technologies, research, and innovation. This reflects a transition from technology as a supporting tool within the school to technology as core infrastructure through which education can be redesigned and expanded. Platforms, networks, and data have become components of educational assets, while virtual education has become an institutional model rather than the occasional use of audiovisual resources.

Digital transformation nevertheless raises new issues that were not addressed in detail in the earlier document, including data security and privacy, equitable access to devices and connectivity, the quality of digital content, service continuity, and accountability for technology-related decisions. Implementing the Law therefore requires regulations and guidelines that prevent digital expansion from becoming a new source of inequality and ensure that technology remains a means of achieving learning rather than an end in itself.

17: Oversight, Accountability, and Penalties

The 1970 document relied on technical, administrative, and ethical supervision. Article 175 subjected private education to the supervision of the competent authorities, while Article 179 defined the objectives of this supervision in terms of ensuring appropriate standards, educational orientation, and support. The provisions concerning examinations and evaluation also emphasized accuracy and integrity, while Article 177 referred the conditions and obligations governing private education to a separate law. However, the document itself did not contain a detailed framework governing violations, investigations, penalties, and appeals. The 2026 Law devoted Articles 57–65 to accountability and protection. Article 57 stipulated that the provisions governing employment discipline and labor relations should apply to teachers and administrative staff according to the sector in which they work. Article 58 authorized the adoption of urgent measures to protect the educational environment when evidence shows conduct that threatens public order or national unity. Article 59 specified the penalties applicable to serious and non-serious violations, including termination of employment and disqualification from returning to educational work in particular cases. Article 60 specified penalties for private institutions, ranging from warnings and suspension of student registration to fines and revocation of licenses, while ensuring that students are able to complete the academic year. Article 61 protected students' rights from the consequences of institutional violations. Article 62 established a specialized committee to examine and investigate violations, while Article 63 guaranteed the right to appeal before the competent judicial authority within the prescribed period. Article 65 also required institutions to report cases of assault or abuse. This represents a transition from general administrative supervision to statutory accountability in which violations, investigative authorities, penalties, and appeal rights are clearly defined. The Law balances the protection of the educational environment and students' rights with procedural safeguards for institutions and individuals. The expansion of private and nonprofit participation is therefore accompanied by a more rigorous accountability framework, preventing greater empowerment from resulting in an absence of effective regulation.

18: The Relationship with Development, the Labor Market, and the Future

The 1970 document linked education to development from its general provisions onward. Article 14 brought together knowledge, practical application, and cultural, social, economic, and health development. Article 15 linked education with the state's

general development plan. Article 159 addressed the identification of the Kingdom's labor-force needs at various levels and across different fields, while Article 229 affirmed that developing human capacity is fundamental to utilizing all other resources. These provisions demonstrate an early awareness of education's economic role and the need to align educational expansion with national needs. The language of the document, however, reflected an economy that was still developing its national workforce and therefore emphasized preparing workers, professions, and specializations required by the state. The 2026 Law broadened this relationship to encompass the knowledge economy and future competencies. Article 2(6) included economic, technological, environmental, and civilizational knowledge. Article 2(8) emphasized critical and creative thinking and problem-solving, while Articles 2(9) and 2(10) addressed lifelong learning, research, innovation, and emerging technologies. The Law also permits diverse educational models, international programs, virtual institutions, and investment partnerships that enhance flexibility and responsiveness to change. The development therefore represents a transition from preparing human resources to meet development needs toward building capabilities that enable learners to adapt to a rapidly changing labor market and contribute to the production of knowledge and innovation. The underlying principle nevertheless remains unchanged: education cannot be separated from development. What has changed is the scope of development—from supplying the workforce to building a diversified economy founded on knowledge, technology, innovation, and lifelong learning.

Major Overall Similarities and Differences:

Despite the considerable time separating the two documents, the comparison reveals a stable common foundation. Both regard education as a public responsibility led and supervised by the state. Both link education to Islamic principles, national identity, and development, and emphasize the need for an appropriate educational environment, competent teachers, and curricula that fulfill societal objectives. They also recognize nongovernmental education subject to licensing and oversight, affirm the importance of evaluating students and the educational process, and view education as inseparable from moral development, character formation, and social responsibility. Continuity is particularly evident in the principles of free education and state responsibility. Article 233 of the 1970 document established free education in all forms and at all levels provided by the state. Articles 3(1) and 3(2) of the 2026 Law reaffirmed that education is a right for all and is provided free of charge in public institutions. This principle is not altered by the fact that the new Law permits investment, outsourcing, and tuition fees in private institutions, as these mechanisms operate alongside free public education rather than replacing it. This continuity is important for understanding the nature of the reform, as it demonstrates that administrative and economic transformation has not been accompanied by an abandonment of the social foundations of education. Both documents also affirm the

centrality of the national frame of reference, although they differ in the level of detail. The earlier document established Islam as the foundation of all dimensions of education policy and explained its implications for objectives, curricula, and conduct. The new Law consolidates this foundation within a focused set of objectives, particularly Article 2(1), and distributes its implementation across the National Curriculum Framework, regulations, and educational programs. The difference in this respect concerns the method of codification rather than the underlying frame of reference.

The first major difference relates to the function of each text. The 1970 document was drafted as a general policy explaining why the state educates its citizens and what values, characteristics, and forms of knowledge it seeks to cultivate. Its language was therefore broad, educational, and human-centered. The 2026 Law, by contrast, was drafted to determine how the education system should be governed, who holds decision-making authority, what rights and obligations apply to the parties involved, and what procedures follow licensing decisions or violations. Consequently, the Law is more concise in articulating educational philosophy but more detailed in matters of governance and accountability.

The second difference concerns the distribution of responsibilities. The earlier document frequently referred broadly to the state or the competent educational authorities, while Article 231 merely established the Supreme Council for Education and referred its detailed organization to separate regulations. The new Law, however, sets out in Articles 7–14 the composition, responsibilities, operating procedures, and Secretariat of the General Education Affairs Council. It then specifies the Ministry's functions and the possibility of delegating authority to education departments. Responsibility has therefore become more traceable, although the centralized nature of decision-making remains evident.

The third difference concerns the concept of quality. Under the earlier document, quality was expected to result from the proper selection of teachers, sound curricula and textbooks, adequate school buildings, accurate examinations, and effective supervision. The new Law transforms these elements into a quality-assurance system comprising a national evaluation authority, national and international assessments, school accreditation, international standards, and performance-monitoring data under Article 30. This development makes quality more measurable and comparable. At the same time, it creates a need to ensure that educational quality is not reduced to quantitative indicators at the expense of moral and human development.

The fourth difference concerns the status of educational stakeholders. In the 1970 document, students and teachers were the primary recipients of care and guidance, and the state defined the qualities and programs they required. The 2026 Law adds clearly specified rights and obligations under Articles 38, 48, and 49 and connects violations with formal procedures and penalties. The relationship has therefore shifted from predominantly ethical and administrative guidance to a statutory relationship in which responsibility can be determined, and decisions may be formally challenged.

The fifth difference lies in the scope of nongovernmental participation. The 1970 document confined such activity to private education licensed to Saudi nationals and treated it as a parallel pathway supported and supervised by the state. Under the new Law, the private sector, nonprofit sector, and foreign investors are potential partners in educational provision, management, operation, and investment. The private and nonprofit sectors are also represented on the General Education Affairs Council pursuant to Article 7(10). This does not place these stakeholders on an equal footing with the state in terms of responsibility or authority, but it significantly broadens the institutional space available for their participation.

The sixth difference concerns financing and assets. The earlier document regarded the public budget as the principal source of financing and viewed buildings and equipment as inputs that the state was required to provide. The new Law approaches financing as a portfolio of instruments and regards assets as resources whose life cycles and utilization must be efficiently managed. Accordingly, Articles 14, 34, 35, and 52 introduce school funds, donations, diverse forms of support, regulated tuition fees, leasing, contracting, outsourcing, use outside school hours, and investment.

The seventh difference concerns diversity and innovation. Article 207 of the earlier document emphasized curricular flexibility and responsiveness to different environments and circumstances, but the document largely retained a unified institutional model. The new Law permits virtual institutions, international programs, and innovative educational models while maintaining the national framework, licensing requirements, and regulatory oversight. This represents a transition from flexibility within a unified model to regulated diversity among educational models themselves.

These differences should not lead to the simplistic conclusion that one document is inherently superior to the other. The 1970 document performed a fundamental historical function by unifying the direction of education, building the system, and expanding access. The 2026 Law responds to the complexities of a mature education system requiring governance, measurement, and partnerships. The scholarly value of the comparison lies in understanding the principles retained by the new Law, the mechanisms it has introduced, and the areas requiring further development through implementing regulations and an updated education policy framework. The comparison demonstrates that the 1970 Education Policy Document and the 2026 General Education Law do not represent contradictory philosophies. Rather, they reflect two stages in the development of the state and its education system. The new Law preserves the Islamic frame of reference, national belonging, state responsibility, free public education, and concern for teachers, students, curricula, quality, and equity. These elements constitute a clear line of continuity between the two documents.

At the same time, the language and regulatory instruments have changed. The earlier document was characterized by comprehensive moral and educational guidance, detailed treatment of objectives, curricula, and educational stages, and reliance on centralized state authority and competent educational bodies. The new Law is

characterized by clearly defined structures and responsibilities, the regulation of rights and obligations, the introduction of accreditation, external assessments, penalties and appeals, and the expansion of partnerships, outsourcing, and investment. This transformation can be explained by changing historical priorities. In 1970, the priority was to establish the system, expand schooling, unify its frame of reference, and develop national human resources. In 2026, in addition to maintaining access, the priorities include improving quality and efficiency, regulating a large and complex system, managing relationships among multiple entities, protecting rights, and responding to technological change and the global economy.

The state has also moved from comprehensive direct administration toward regulatory leadership supported by multiple instruments. It remains a financier, guarantor, and provider of education, but it also permits delegation, involves curriculum and evaluation bodies, provides representation for the private and nonprofit sectors on the Council, and allows outsourcing and investment. These expanded arrangements are accompanied by stricter accreditation, accountability, penalties, and student-protection measures.

Other major transformations include the shift from an implicit concept of quality dispersed across requirements concerning teachers, curricula, buildings, and examinations to an explicit system based on standards, national and international assessments, accreditation, and data. Rights have similarly developed from principles of care into clearly defined statutory positions for students and teachers. Educational assets have moved from being facilities that must be provided to strategic resources that may be managed and invested under regulated arrangements. Nevertheless, the new Law requires implementing regulations and operational guidelines to translate its provisions into clear practices, particularly in delegation, school funds, donations, fees, outsourcing, asset investment, data protection, and inclusion. The Law's concise treatment of educational foundations and objectives also shows the continued need for a national education policy framework that preserves the philosophical and moral depth of the 1970 document while updating it in light of contemporary developments.

Conclusions of the Study:

The study found that the 1970 Education Policy Document constituted a comprehensive intellectual and educational framework for developing the Saudi education system. It integrated Islamic principles with national, social, and developmental objectives. The study also found that the 2026 General Education Law preserved these fundamental principles while reformulating the organization of education within a statutory framework that more clearly defines institutional structures, responsibilities, and procedures. State responsibility and free education emerged as central elements of continuity. The new Law reaffirms that education is a right for all and is provided free of charge in public institutions, even as nongovernmental entities expand their participation. Governance has also shifted from broad central supervision and general references to competent authorities toward an

institutional structure that defines the roles of the General Education Affairs Council, the Ministry, and education departments, together with decision-making and delegation mechanisms. The comparison revealed that educational objectives have developed from a comprehensive formulation emphasizing the formation of virtuous and productive Muslim individuals to an approach that combines such development with future competencies, critical thinking, innovation, and emerging technologies. Curriculum governance has also shifted from the general responsibility of educational authorities to collaboration among the Ministry, the Education and Training Evaluation Commission, and the National Curriculum Center, while permitting international programs and innovative models within the framework of national oversight. The status of teachers and students has developed from general principles of care to clearly defined rights and obligations. Quality has similarly shifted from implicit requirements and internal evaluation to an explicit system comprising school accreditation, national and international assessments, international standards, and data. Equity and inclusion have been strengthened through regulations for students with disabilities and gifted students, consideration of individual differences, and the provision of a safe educational environment. Nevertheless, effective implementation and equitable financing remain essential. The study also found that private education has evolved into a broader partnership involving the private and nonprofit sectors and foreign investors in governance, educational provision, management, operation, and investment. Financing has expanded from primary dependence on public budgets, stipends, and subsidies to a diverse set of instruments, including school funds, donations, multiple forms of support, regulated tuition fees, and partnerships. Asset management has likewise moved from merely providing buildings and equipment toward sustainability, investment, and diverse arrangements for ownership, operation, and utilization. Finally, accountability has become clearer and more detailed through the specification of violations, penalties, investigation procedures, appeal rights, and student-protection measures. The 2026 Law thus represents a transition from a comprehensive education policy centrally led by the state to a regulatory system involving multiple authorities and partners, while the state retains responsibility for guaranteeing, financing, regulating, and assuring the quality of education.

Recommendations of the Study:

The study recommends developing an integrated and updated national framework for general education policy that combines the philosophical and moral depth of the 1970 document with the statutory and institutional structure of the 2026 Law. This framework should clarify the relationship between overarching educational objectives, implementing regulations, operational procedures, and performance indicators. The study also recommends accelerating the issuance of the Law's implementing regulations and clearly specifying responsibilities, timelines, and procedures, particularly regarding delegation, private education, school funds, donations, outsourcing, and asset investment. The study also recommends developing

a publicly available matrix of powers and responsibilities that clarifies the respective roles of the General Education Affairs Council, the Ministry, education departments, educational institutions, the Education and Training Evaluation Commission, and the National Curriculum Center. Such a matrix would help reduce overlap and duplication. Delegation should also be linked to institutional readiness and capacity and supported by a clear accountability and evaluation system. A national framework for educational quality assurance should be developed to encompass inputs, processes, and outcomes and to connect accreditation, financing, incentives, and outsourcing with learning outcomes, equity, and stakeholder satisfaction. Accessible periodic reports on performance and quality should also be published while ensuring data protection and privacy. Regarding partnerships, the study recommends regulating the participation of the private and nonprofit sectors and foreign investors according to criteria that balance innovation and financial sustainability with the protection of national identity and students' rights. Support, exemptions, and contractual arrangements should be tied to measurable indicators of performance and impact. The role of the nonprofit sector should also be strengthened in underserved regions and among groups with greater needs, while safeguards should prevent partnerships from becoming a source of inequality. The study also recommends establishing a governance framework for educational financing and assets. This framework should regulate school funds, donations, fees, contracts, and investment and ensure transparency, disclosure, value-for-money assessment, and equitable resource distribution. The investment in educational buildings and land should remain subordinate to the educational and social purposes of the asset rather than replacing them. Finally, the study recommends conducting periodic evaluative studies of the Law's implementation after its regulations are issued. Further specialized studies should examine governance, quality, equity, financing, citizenship, curricula, and human resources. Such research would provide an evidence base for continuous improvement and help maintain a balance between established national principles and future requirements.

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