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Article

## Education in Al-Kharj: Modest Beginnings, Developed Reality, and a Promising Future

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### Abstract

This study examines education in the Al-Kharj Governorate. Prior to the establishment of formal schooling, education in Al-Kharj was imparted through Quranic and Hadith study circles, as well as reading and writing sessions. Many residents acquired their education through these means, subsequently serving as judges and teachers. Following the unification of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, these study circles evolved into kuttabs and later transitioned into formal schools. The first formal school in Al-Kharj, Thumamah bin Athal School, was established in 1362 AH and was initially known as Waziriya School. The expansion of educational institutions continued, culminating in a total of 530 schools: 130 boys' schools accommodating 24,222 students, 167 girls' schools catering to 42,692 students, and a total of 4,739 teachers. Furthermore, there are 45 private schools for both boys and girls, five international schools, the Scientific Institute, the Secondary Agricultural Institute, the Vocational and Technical Training Centre, the Technical College, and Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University. The Girls' College of Education, which initially functioned as a medium college before evolving into a college of education, preceded its two branches: scientific and literary. The study is structured into three sections: the first examines education prior to the unification of the Kingdom, the second discusses the early stages of education in Al-Kharj, and the third explores its development and future prospects.

### Keywords

Al-Kharj Governorate, Education, Formal Schools, Kuttabs.

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## Introduction

In recent years, increasing attention has been directed towards this subject due to its significant implications for advancing both theoretical knowledge and practical applications (Gauss, Perkins, & Tjardes, 2023). The topic is closely interconnected with key areas within the discipline, drawing upon fundamental issues that have broad applications, even beyond its immediate scope. Further exploration of this field has highlighted the necessity of deeper comprehension for both theoretical development and practical implementation, underscoring the timeliness and relevance of this research. The research problem addressed in this study is pivotal in bridging gaps within the existing literature. While numerous studies have examined aspects of this issue, few have comprehensively investigated its specific dimensions. No published research appears to systematically examine or concurrently compare and contrast the selected key variables in an integrated manner. This study seeks to fill this gap by systematically analysing these variables and their interrelationships, thereby enriching the current body of knowledge (Mann et al., 2021). The problem statement is thus framed within the context of addressing inconsistencies and contradictions in prior studies and providing a more cohesive foundation for future research inquiries (Zhu et al., 2024). The significance of this study lies in aligning the practical application of the model more closely with its academic conceptualisation. Unlike most studies that focus on addressing emerging challenges, this research aims to advance both theoretical discourse and practical implementation. The intended audience includes policymakers and practitioners within the field, as the study's findings are expected to inform and drive change. Accordingly, this research makes a substantive contribution to the existing literature (Ramos Cordeiro et al., 2024).

Despite the abundance of available information, several gaps and inconsistencies hinder a comprehensive understanding of the subject. Extensive studies have been conducted with minimal integration, while many investigations have examined specific components in isolation from their broader contextual settings (Braam, Jephcott, & Wood, 2021; Mann et al., 2021). These limitations highlight the need for a framework that consolidates diverse research approaches. This study seeks to address these gaps by enhancing knowledge in this area and expanding the existing literature (Zhu et al., 2024). This topic has garnered considerable interest from researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, reflecting a growing recognition of its importance and practical relevance in addressing disciplinary challenges (Gauss et al., 2023). As stakeholders increasingly acknowledge the implications of the phenomenon under investigation, there has been a consistent demand for evidence-based research. This study aims to meet this need by generating new insights and knowledge that are both current and relevant (Ramos Cordeiro et al., 2024).

### **Research Problem**

The Al-Kharj Governorate in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia faces a range of challenges and opportunities within the realm of education, which are intrinsically linked to the developmental objectives outlined in Vision 2030. While the region has significantly increased its investment in educational infrastructure and support services, a notable gap persists: the absence of a clear alignment between educational initiatives and the socio-economic advancement of the area. Key issues hindering the effective implementation of educational policies include inadequate teacher training, limited integration of technology in pedagogical practices, and insufficient community engagement in the educational process (Aldhilan, Rafiq, & Afzal, 2024). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the adoption of technology-driven education, has exacerbated disparities in access to quality education, particularly in remote and underserved areas of Al-Kharj (Fahed Suliman & Asma Abdullah, 2024).

The educational landscape in Al-Kharj Governorate has undergone significant transformation over time, evolving from modest beginnings marked by small Quranic study circles and Kuttabs to a robust system that now includes a university with diverse colleges and specialised programmes (Aldosari, 2024). This study seeks to explore the pivotal stages of educational development in the region, addressing the following questions: What were the foundational phases of education in Al-Kharj Governorate? What major advancements have shaped the current educational framework? And what potential opportunities exist for further progress in the region's educational sector? By examining these aspects, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the historical and contemporary dynamics of education in Al-Kharj, while identifying pathways for future growth and alignment with broader socio-economic goals.

### ***Research Objectives***

1. To evaluate and improve the teacher preparation programs in Al-Kharj Governorate so they can better fit the needs of Vision 2030.
2. To assess and improve the use of technology in the teaching and learning process at educational institutions in Al-Kharj.
3. To increase and deepen community involvement in the educational development of Al-Kharj Governorate.
4. To identify and remove cultural and social barriers that hamper educational development in Al-Kharj, ensuring alignment with Vision 2030's larger goals.

### **Literature Review**

The research is extended in scope to cover nationwide investigations of these matters, recognising Governorate of Al-Kharj as a key area in the Kingdom and a key contributor to Saudi economic advancement. National research is critiqued in a structured manner. Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia is a vision for economic diversification and reforms in education in line with best practices in the international scene. The current research conducts a comprehensive review of transformation in the Kingdom in matters related to teacher training practices, technology integration, and use of STEM education. It also analyses nationwide policies and identifies challenges in implementing them. Synthesising selected research findings differentiates convergent findings and divergent findings, providing in-depth analysis of implications.

#### ***Teacher Preparation and Professional Development***

Different research shows teacher preparation programs enhance instructional practices in addressing current challenges. [Alharbi and Albidewi \(2024\)](#) provide history on teacher training programs in Saudi Arabia and suggest reforms in teacher competency measuring. Schools require redesigned curricula and in-service training programs aligned to Vision 2030 values, as they state. [Allmnakrah and Evers \(2020\)](#) document a mismatch in implementing Vision 2030 in teacher training since there is no uptake in modern instructional practices in schools. Educational leadership is mentioned as pivotal in managing transformation and initiating teacher training reforms. Unlike other authors who suggest individual solutions, they have a different perception in addressing these issues.

#### ***Technological Integration and AI in Higher Education***

[Faisal \(2024\)](#) presents the potential for better learning outcomes in Saudi higher education through use of AI but states that effective utilization of its features is subject to rising technological expertise among trainers. Instructional technology in use in private international schools is established to improve engagement among learners and can be a viable exemplar for broader utilization. [Al-Shehri \(2023\)](#) identifies two primary challenges that arose in digital education during the COVID-19 pandemic: insufficient preparedness among educators and students, and technical difficulties faced by learners. While AI and digital tools offer promising opportunities, their successful adoption requires substantial investment in teacher training and the development of robust digital infrastructure.

#### ***Special Education and Inclusion Policies***

The content analysis conducted by [Almakrob et al. \(2024\)](#) analyses neurodiversity in schools in Saudi Arabia in line with legislations for special education and identifying empowering and restrictive aspects in making schools more inclusive. The authors are keenly interested in updating policies for creating a better learning space in schools.

#### ***STEM Education and Curriculum Reforms***

Prioritized is still given to STEM training as is seen in various Vision 2030-aligned reports. [Babineau \(2023\)](#) traces significant investments in STEM in forms of better curricula and upgrades in infrastructure as a direct outcome of programs for economic diversification aimed at providing better competencies for students. A general trend towards adopting innovative instructional practices in dental schools is noticed in tandem with scientific and technological breakthroughs. [Siambi \(2023\)](#) traces the impact created by Saudi reforms in training

and proves beneficial for the students while noticing discrepancies in implementing policies in different branches of learning. Successful implementation of these extensive reforms would require better planning and benchmarking in line with international learning frameworks.

### ***Educational Policy and Reform Implementation***

The performance of Vision 2030 policies in education is controversial. One report indicates there is general readiness in adapting in Saudi schools despite problems. [Makhlouf \(2021\)](#) A different report, however, indicates severe loopholes in policy application. The current research joins this academic discourse inasmuch as it makes a comparison between policies in Saudi and Bahraini and advises reforms in learning foreign languages in a move towards intensified competition in the world [Popa \(2025\)](#).

### ***Religious and Ethical Education Reforms***

[Al-Otaibi \(2020\)](#) talks about religious learning in Vision 2030 and how religious learning is being reformed to incorporate programs aimed at eradicating extremist ideologies and nurturing moderate Islamic interpretation. The research is compared to research in dealing in STEM and technology and how it represents Saudi Arabia's twin track in conserving culture and religion while achieving scientific breakthroughs.

### ***Key Findings and Thematic Synthesis***

1. Most studies acknowledge that teacher education reforms address fundamental needs; however, they differ in their assessments of the complexities involved in implementation ([Alharbi & Albidewi, 2024](#)).
2. The adoption of AI and digital tools is hindered primarily by infrastructure limitations and deficiencies in staff training ([Al-Shehri, 2023](#); [Faisal, 2024](#)).
3. The simultaneous advancement of inclusive education training programmes and legislative reforms remains a priority ([Almakrob et al., 2024](#)).
4. Research highlights progress in STEM education and higher education reforms through investments in STEM fields and dental programmes, yet disparities in implementation persist ([Babineau, 2023](#); [Siambi, 2023](#)).
5. The execution of Vision 2030 policies is challenged by unreliable school oversight mechanisms, inadequate teacher competency benchmarks, and structural deficiencies ([Makhlouf, 2021](#)).
6. Saudi Arabia modernises religious education in alignment with the broader objectives of Vision 2030 ([Al-Otaibi, 2020](#)).

In conclusion, educational reforms under Vision 2030 encompass multiple dimensions, including teacher training, technological integration, STEM development, policy implementation, and religious studies. While notable progress has been made, significant gaps remain in ensuring consistency, digital readiness, and policies for individuals with disabilities. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive strategy that integrates teacher training, technological investment, and structured policy planning to achieve sustainable educational reform.

## **Methodology**

The research applied a descriptive analytical method, selected for consistency in fulfilling research objectives. The method involves quantitative and qualitative dimensions and is consequently a mixed-method research.

### ***Research Significance***

This research is practically and theoretically significant for research in the sector in the region. Theoretically, it makes new contributions in critically examining history, current status, and vision for Al-Kharj's system of learning. It addresses core research gaps in understanding unique problems in addressing governorate-level learning concerns, ensuring practices in learning in the governorate are aligned to broader Vision 2030 targets. By tracing steps in history in learning in Al-Kharj, this research provides a paradigm for enhancing policies and practices in learning in line with contemporary standards. Practically, research provides actionable recommendations for leaders in society, teachers, and policymakers in Al-Kharj. Its findings will allow practical application in reforms in teacher training, deployment of technology, and engagement in society, resulting in quality improvement in schools in the region. By identifying and addressing cultural and societal learning

obstacles, this research contributes towards overcoming learning hindrances. Its practical implications are beyond Al-Kharj, offering lessons for use in other governorates in Saudi Arabia faced with similar problems and supporting broader achievement in Vision 2030 targets in schools.

## **Results and Discussion**

Education in the Arabian Peninsula is rich and vast in history and is inextricably linked to Islamic rise and spread in the peninsula. Before there was a united Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, however, there were severe social, political, and financial hindrances to education. Despite these hindrances, learning still took place in the form of learning in early schools and in mosques and in kuttabs as a basis for later Kingdom formal learning. Al-Kharj, a fertile and strategically located district east-southeast of Riyadh, had some contribution towards early learning activity. As in Islamic society in general, learning in Al-Kharj happened in early schools and in mosques and in kuttabs as a method for preserving and passing on learning. Institutions and some prominent figures had some contribution towards sustaining learning in the district.

The move towards formal schooling marked a milestone in learning in the history of Al-Kharj. The establishment of schools marked a time when the region experienced the start of a systematized and integrated learning system. The trend went on as modern forms of learning, rising numbers of middle and secondary schools, and teacher training colleges came into place. Education in Al-Kharj dramatically improved since and while it increased in scope, it absorbed modern technology as well, altering learning and governance processes. Education in Al-Kharj greatly impacted the economy in the region as well. It has contributed to poverty reduction by equipping individuals with essential skills and knowledge, leading to increased employment opportunities and improved living standards. Additionally, education has fostered innovation and entrepreneurship, which are vital for the region's economic and social growth. The outcomes of these developments can be analysed as follows.

### ***Section One: Education Before the Unification of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia***

Islam gives much significance to knowledge as a gift given to man by Allah, raising man's dignity and status. The idea is supported in the Quran when Adam is portrayed as being separated from angels based on knowledge, thus proving to be a key principle in Islamic teachings. Since the advent of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, education has played a central role in spreading wisdom and enlightenment, fostering intellectual advancement rather than ignorance. However, like much of the Islamic world, the Saudi Arabian education system historically faced significant societal, political, and economic challenges that hindered its progress (Alnahdi, 2020). Traditional education primarily focused on religious instruction, literacy, and numeracy, producing scholars, judges, and teachers. Nevertheless, the absence of a formalised structure limited access to education, slowing its overall development.

With the unification of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, reforms were introduced to transition from traditional methods to a formal education system. The government established schools incorporating modern curricula, including mathematics, the sciences, and Arabic literature (Zehri & Alharithi, 2024). These reforms laid the foundation for structured and inclusive education, marking the beginning of the nation's intellectual and national development. Saudi Arabia's history is generally divided into three stages: the First Saudi State, established in 1139 AH/1727 AD under the leadership of Imam Muhammad bin Saud in Diriyah; the Second Saudi State, re-established in 1240 AH/1824 AD by Prince Turki bin Abdullah after regaining Najd from the Ottoman Empire; and the Third Saudi State, which began in 1319 AH/1902 AD when King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al Saud reclaimed Riyadh from the Al Rashid clan. Before the establishment of the Third Saudi State, educational conditions were relatively limited. The unification of the Kingdom by King Abdulaziz brought significant efforts to expand access to education. However, both Bedouin and urban populations faced educational challenges due to harsh living conditions, scarce resources, political instability, and financial constraints. During this period, education was primarily delivered through three channels: study circles in mosques, kuttabs, and early schooling initiatives.

### ***Education in Mosques***

The mosque has historically played a central role in education, extending beyond religious instruction to encompass broader educational and social development. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

transformed the mosque into a centre for learning, guidance, and religious discourse, incorporating study circles and sermons. Mosques provided an ideal setting for education, with the Holy Mosque in Makkah and Al-Masjid An-Nabawi in Madinah serving as significant institutions for both worship and scholarly pursuits. These mosques facilitated the teaching of the Holy Qur'an, its interpretation, writing, recitation rules, and other forms of religious knowledge available at the time, a tradition that persisted until the late Ottoman period in the Hijaz (Idriz, 2022). Students engaged in mosque-based education were divided into two main groups. The first consisted of regular students who attended lessons from morning to evening, dedicating several years to earning certifications from specialised scholars in their respective fields. The second group comprised listening students, who participated in study circles solely to acquire knowledge without seeking formal academic credentials. Unlike structured modern education systems, mosque education imposed no age restrictions; any individual, regardless of age, could join the study circles, provided they had the desire and capacity to learn (Katni, Sumarni, & Muslim, 2022).

### ***Kuttab Education***

Kuttab, the plural form of Kuttub, evolved into educational centres focused on teaching reading, writing, Holy Qur'an memorisation, Islamic principles, and Arabic studies. Their instructional approach relied on repetitive memorisation techniques (Dawolo et al., 2024). The term Kuttub signifies a dedicated educational space, characterised by the Arabic letter kaf followed by the stressed taa vowel (Mutaqin, 2023). According to Al-Mu'jam Al-Waseet, Kuttab served as foundational institutions attached to mosques, providing essential literacy, Qur'anic teachings, Islamic law, Arabic studies, and basic mathematics. Lisan Al-Arab describes Kuttab as "places for teaching writing." These institutions were known by different regional names, such as khalawi in Sudan, mal'amah in Somalia, and *lecturers* in Morocco and Mauritania (Dawolo et al., 2024).

Traditionally, Kuttab served as spaces where boys gathered to memorise the Qur'an through reading and writing while learning Islamic principles, Arabic, and other foundational sciences. Before the establishment of formal schools, Kuttab in Najd were either integrated within mosques, located separately, or held in the teacher's home (Al-Mutawa). Students sat in a circle, each equipped with a wooden writing board crafted by carpenters. These boards measured approximately 60 cm by 20 cm by 2 cm and featured a perforation at the top for a string handle, facilitating easy transport. Lessons, known as Al-Khitta, were inscribed onto the board by the teacher, and students repeatedly copied them until they had memorised the content. Upon mastery, the instructor instructed them to erase the text with the phrase, "You memorised it; clean your board." The board was then wiped using alum, a clay-and-water mixture, to prepare for the next lesson. The learning process typically began with individual letter recognition before advancing to complete texts (Almalki, 2022). Before the Third Saudi State, both boys' and girls' Kuttab were prevalent across regions such as Al-Ahsa, Al-Qassim, Asir, Tihama, and Hijaz. In Makkah and Madinah, their numbers were so vast that they were difficult to quantify. At the start of the 14th century AH, Makkah had 43 Kuttab, Madinah had at least 24, and Al-Ahsa province contained over 30 (Bowen, 2024). In Najd, however, Kuttab were relatively small in scale (Almalki, 2022).

### ***Formal Education***

The term refers to the structured education system that emerged in the Arabian Peninsula during the sixth century AH, particularly in the Hijaz region. The Hijaz displayed significant interest in this form of education, which was conducted in Turkish under the supervision of the Ottoman state, leading to the establishment of several schools. However, these institutions were short-lived due to various factors. Following the arrival of Sharif Hussein bin Ali, Arabic schools replaced these Ottoman institutions. In Diriyah, central Najd, four schools were established, each affiliated with one of the sons of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab, and they received financial support from the public treasury (Alias, 2023).

Despite their establishment, these schools saw minimal curriculum development or geographic expansion until the late 13th century AH. Just before the advent of the Third Saudi State, the Arabian Peninsula witnessed the emergence of three more advanced and modern types of schools. The first were Ottoman schools, introduced after the Ottoman state annexed the Hijaz region, where most teachers were Turkish and instruction was delivered in Turkish. The second type, Hashimite schools, was established after Sharif Hussein abolished the Ottoman schools and introduced Arabic-based institutions designed to train government employees. The third type comprised private schools, founded by patriotic citizens in response to the failure of official authorities to establish a comprehensive and balanced educational system before the Third Saudi State. Notable examples of

these private schools include Al-Solatiyya, Al-Najah, and Al-Falah (Fauziah et al., 2024).

### ***Section Two: Education in Al-Kharj: Humble Beginnings***

Al-Kharj Governorate, located southeast of Riyadh, spans 120,000 square kilometres and falls administratively within the Riyadh region, with Al-Saih as its main centre. The name "Al-Kharj" is believed to originate from its naturally fertile land, which requires no tools for cultivation. Another interpretation suggests that the name refers to a valley with no outlet, aligning with the region's geographical characteristics. Before the establishment of formal education, teaching in Al-Kharj, as in the broader Islamic world, was conducted through mosque study circles and kuttabs in homes. Various social, political, and economic factors significantly hindered the educational process, creating challenges in the region's early learning development.

Kuttabs have long been recognised in the Islamic world, dating back to the early period of Islam, with the primary purpose of educating children in Islamic teachings. It is recorded that the first to establish a kuttab in Islam was Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab, who assigned Amer ibn Abdullah Al-Khuza'i to oversee children's education, with financial support from the public treasury. Study sessions were held between dawn and mid-morning and from noon to the afternoon prayers. This educational system extended to Al-Kharj, where students learned reading, writing, the Qur'an, its sciences, and the traditions of the Prophet. The region produced both scholars and educators, and several kuttabs became well known. Notable kuttabs in Al-Saih included those of Sheikh Salem bin Nasser Al-Hanaki, Sheikh Mohammed bin Turki Al-Maiman, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Shuayshan, and Sheikh Abdullah bin Saqir. In Al-Dubay'ah, the kuttab of Sheikh Issa bin Zaid Al-Zair gained prominence (Wrońska, Hałasa, & Szczuko, 2024).

In Najjan, kuttabs led by Sheikh Ahmed bin Issa bin Ghamlas, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Atiq, and Sheikh Issa bin Zaid Al-Zair were well established. Similarly, Al-Yamamah saw significant contributions from figures such as Sheikh Abdul-Aziz Al-Muwaziri, Sheikh Khudair bin Nasser Al-Khudair, and Sheikh Ali bin Khudair Al-Khudair. Before the Third Saudi period, kuttabs were widespread among both boys and girls in Al-Ahsa, Al-Qassim, Asir, Tihama, and Hijaz, with a particularly dense presence in Mecca and Medina, where their numbers were so vast they were difficult to quantify. By the early 14th AH century, Mecca had 43 kuttabs, Medina had at least 24, and Al-Ahsa had more than 30 (Bowen, 2024). In Najd, kuttabs were comparatively smaller in number and size (Arar, Sawalhi, & Yilmaz, 2022). Several notable scholars contributed to the dissemination of kuttabs, including Sheikh Ali bin Bassam Al-Hanbali (1087 AH), Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Askar (1128 AH), and Sheikh Rashid bin Mohammed bin Khunein (1162 AH) (Elhadary & Abdelatti, 2024).

During the unification of Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz prioritised educational advancements, including the expansion of kuttabs and informal learning systems. The first formal school in Al-Kharj, Al-Waziriya School, was established in Al-Saih in 1362 AH. It was linked to the agricultural project initiated by King Abdulaziz and overseen by Minister Abdullah bin Suleiman Al-Hamdan. Distinguished scholar Hamad Al-Jasser was chosen to supervise its operations, and Abdul Karim Al-Juhaiman was later appointed as principal when the school transitioned into a formal government institution. Today, it continues under the name Thumamah bin Athal School. Female education in Al-Kharj followed a similar trajectory. Girls learned in home-based kuttabs and women teacher-guided learning circles. The level of learning for women equalled or surpassed that for men and involved learning about the Qur'an, Hadith, and literacy. The schools remained at the centre of learning up to when learning centres opened for formal learning.

### ***Section Three: Education in Al-Kharj – Current Developments and Future Prospects***

Formal schooling in Al-Kharj followed after the collapse of circle schools and traditional kuttabs. The opening of Thumama bin Athal School marked the beginning of formal schooling in the governorate. Three years later in 1365 AH came in the first private school and modern learning methodology came in hand in hand. Formal schooling intensified when there opened in 1368 AH the first school in Al-Yamamah and in 1369 AH, in Al-Salmiya. In Najran, the first school was established in 1374 AH. Schools were subsequently founded in villages and settlements based on local demand. Primary education was the initial focus, with post-primary education emerging in 1376 AH through the establishment of the first intermediate school in Al-Kharj. Secondary education followed in 1385 AH with the opening of the first secondary school in Al-Saih, Al-Kharj. The need for qualified teachers led to the foundation of a teacher training institute in Delam in 1377 AH, with another institute for

intermediate graduates opening in Al-Saih, Al-Kharj, in 1386 AH. Until 1373 AH, these institutions fell under the Education Department in Najd, headquartered in Riyadh. They later came under Riyadh Education Administration supervision until 1379 AH, when the first dedicated educational administration for boys—Southern Education Administration—was established in Al-Kharj to oversee schools in southern Riyadh governorates, including Houta Bani Tamim, Al-Harqiq, Al-Aflaj, Al-Salil, and Wadi Al-Dawasir. This administration was relocated to Al-Aflaj in 1380 AH, with Al-Kharj schools subsequently managed by the Riyadh Education Administration.

Al-Kharj Education Administration underwent multiple changes before achieving its current structure. Initially part of the Southern Riyadh Governorate, an independent Al-Kharj Education Office for boys was established in 1387 AH, operating under Riyadh Education leadership until its dissolution in early 1395 AH. Thereafter, Riyadh Education directly managed Al-Kharj schools. The administration gained independence in 1401 AH when Minister of Education Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Khuaytir established a separate department. In 1425 AH, Education Minister Dr. Mohammed Ahmed Al-Rasheed briefly unified boys' and girls' education under a single director, but a subsequent review led to the creation of a separate administration for girls. A key transformation occurred in the period of Prince Faisal bin Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Saud when, as Education Minister, he merged schools' administrations for boys and girls in a single department in 1425 AH. The decision came in line with Vision 2030 domestic programs harmonizing modern learning practices and technology in line with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Alshammari, 2024). Modern learning research today focuses on modern learning practices in improving learning outcomes (Aldhilan et al., 2024), and cooperation between the public and private sector is pivotal in harmonizing learning infrastructure for future needs.

Girls' education in al-Kharj also improved. A girls' education branch office opened in 1382 AH, and another in al-Dalm in 1392 AH. The necessity for female teachers necessitated opening in 1403 AH a teacher training college at middle level, later changed to train middle and secondary level teachers in 1415/1416 AH. A department for training primary school teachers opened in 1417 AH, later being established as a College of Education. The first administration for girls' education in Al-Kharj was formally established in 1405 AH to oversee the educational process for female students. Beyond formal schooling, Al-Kharj Governorate hosts several specialised educational institutions. The scientific institute affiliated with Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University was established in Al-Saih in 1395 AH. Additionally, a secondary industrial institute, founded in 1403 AH on a 50,000-square-metre site, offers training in eight specialisations. This institution aims to produce skilled professionals aligned with local market needs and adheres to training quality standards and Vision 2030 objectives, fostering strategic partnerships with public and private educational entities (Mhlanga, 2024).

Private education also plays a significant role in Al-Kharj, with 45 private schools, five international schools, and a private commercial secondary institute in the city. The governorate also hosts an educational supervision office and a school health unit in Al-Saih, providing medical and preventive services for female students. The evolution of education in Al-Kharj—from mosque study circles and traditional kuttabs to a semi-formal system with limited resources and ultimately to a diverse, structured formal education system—reflects a broader transformation. The governorate now boasts a comprehensive education framework encompassing government and private schools, supported by international education. The Planning and Information Department of the Al-Kharj Governorate Education Administration provides data illustrating this development as of 21/5/2024.

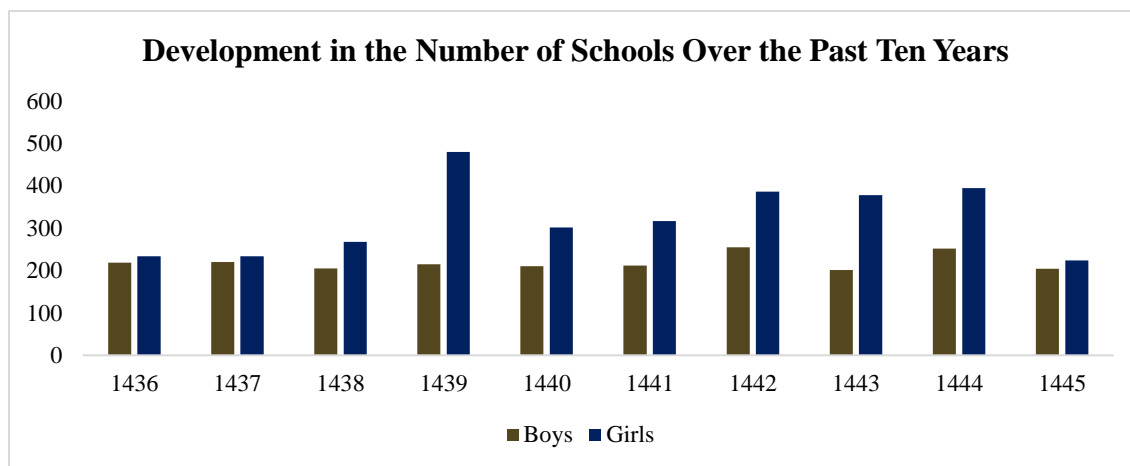
### ***Development in the Number of Schools Over the Past Ten Years***

Table 1 and Figure 1 indicate a decline in the number of schools in the final year of 1445 AH. This reduction is attributed to several factors. First, the integration of early primary grades in boys' schools with girls' schools aligns with current early childhood education policies. Second, schools with fewer than 150 students are being closed, with students transferred to nearby institutions, leading to more crowded learning environments. Third, the phasing out of rented school buildings aims to reduce operational costs.

**Table 1:** *Development in the Number of Schools Over the Past Ten Years.*

Year	1436	1437	1438	1439	1440	1441	1442	1443	1444	1445
Boys	219	220	205	215	210	212	255	201	252	204
Girls	234	234	268	480	302	317	386	378	395	224



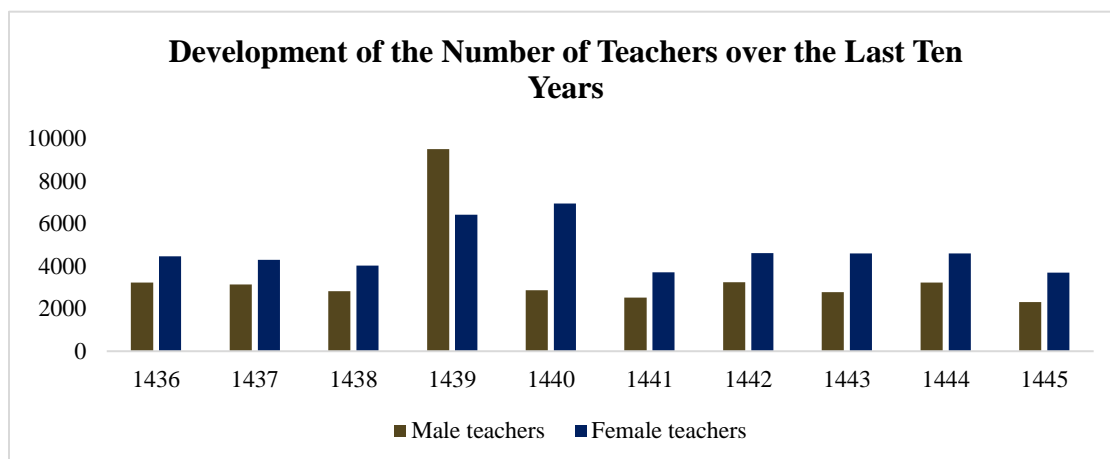


**Figure 1:** Evolution in the Number of Schools Over the Past Ten Years,

Table 2 and Figure 2 illustrate a decline in the number of teachers in recent years. This reduction is attributed to factors such as early retirement options available throughout the academic year, regular retirement, and challenges in filling contract positions due to curriculum development and specialisation. Table 3 and Figure 3 depict the trends in private school numbers. The data indicate that the number of boys’ private schools has remained stable over the past decade, whereas private schools for girls have increased from approximately 20 at the beginning of the period to 25 by the end. Meanwhile, Table 4 shows that the number of international schools remained constant at six throughout the study period, except for the previous year, when one school ceased operations. Table 5 indicates a general growth trend in kindergartens, although a decline occurred in recent years. In 1437 AH, there were 100 kindergartens, but this number dropped to 80 by 1445 AH. This reduction may be attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the closure of some kindergartens and the merging of others into early childhood classes within certain girls' schools, as shown in Figure 4.

**Table 2:** Development of the Number of Teachers Over the Last Ten Years.

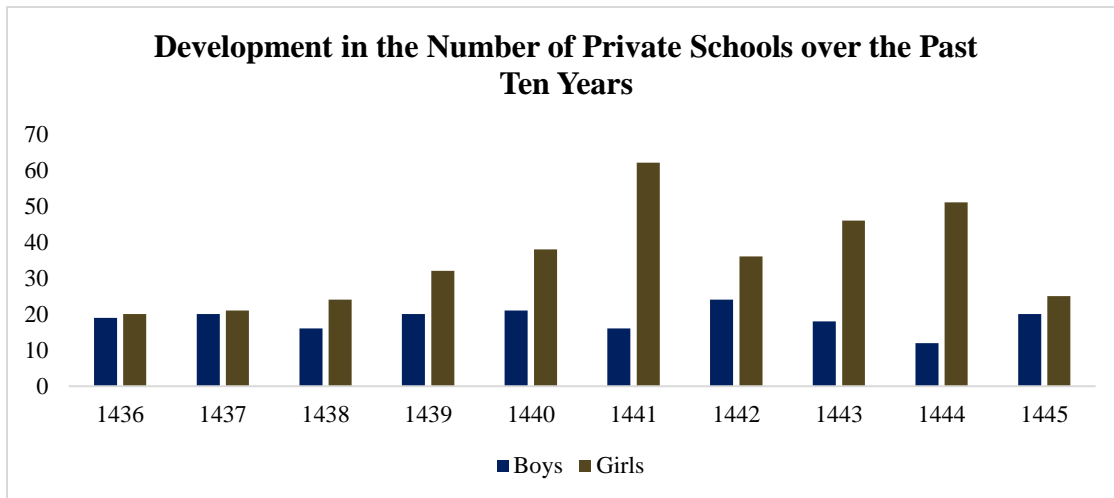
Year	1436	1437	1438	1439	1440	1441	1442	1443	1444	1445
Male Teachers	3235	3132	2826	9502	2862	2523	3241	2780	3231	2310
Female Teachers	4458	4299	4029	6418	6954	3711	4610	4605	4605	3700



**Figure 2:** Development of the Number of Teachers over the Last Ten Years.

**Table 3:** Development in the Number of Private Schools over the Past Ten Years.

Year	1436	1437	1438	1439	1440	1441	1442	1443	1444	1445
Boys	19	20	16	20	21	16	24	18	12	20
Girls	20	21	24	32	38	62	36	46	51	25



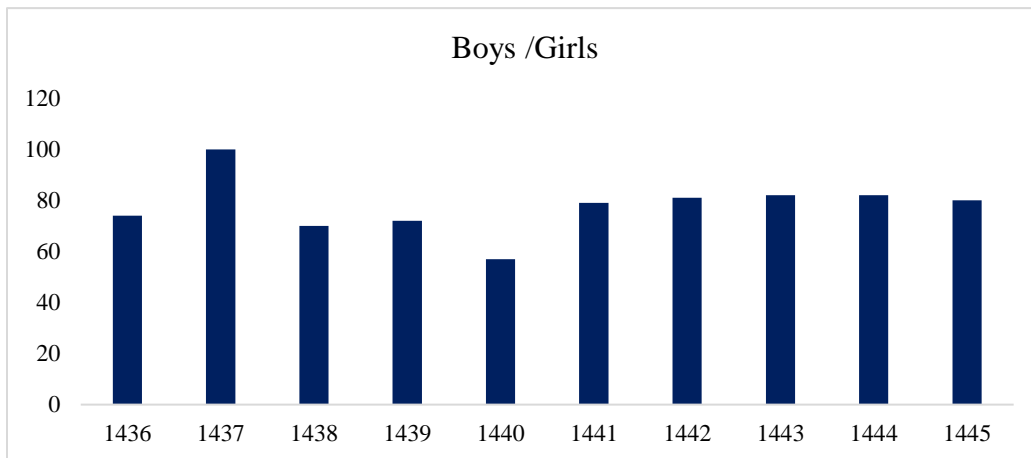
**Figure 3:** Development in the Number of Private Schools Over the Past Ten Years.

**Table 4:** Development in the Number of International Schools Over the Past Ten Years.

Year	1436	1437	1438	1439	1440	1441	1442	1443	1444	1445
Boys /Girls	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5

**Table 5:** Changes in the Number of Kindergartens Over the Last Ten Years.

Year	1436	1437	1438	1439	1440	1441	1442	1443	1444	1445
Boys /Girls	74	100	70	72	57	79	81	82	82	80



**Figure 4:** Changes in the Number of Kindergartens Over the Last Ten Years.

**The Postgraduate in Al Kharj Governorate**

Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, established in 1430 AH (2009), represents higher education in Al-Kharj Governorate. It was founded following a royal decree that transformed King Saud University’s Al-Kharj branch into an independent institution, initially named Al-Kharj University. This restructuring incorporated all girls’ colleges in Al-Kharj, Dalem, Wadi ad-Dawasir, Houta Bani Tamim, Al-Faisal, and Al-Salil, as well as community colleges, forming the core of the new university. The university comprises over 20 theoretical, scientific, and applied colleges, aiming to provide high-quality education, foster a stimulating academic environment, and promote community engagement. Its strategic goals align with economic development plans and national challenges, supported by agreements with the National Transformation Program’s management office. These agreements facilitate continuous review and updating of academic requirements to ensure relevance across Saudi Arabia.

This took place in the form of the opening in 1443 AH of the Applied College, offering specialised diploma programmes in Al-Kharj for four Riyadh-based groups. The same trend is being implemented at Houta

Bani Tamim and Al-Faisal for female students, and at Wadi ad-Dawasir and Al-Salil for male and female students, once again reinforcing the contribution of the university towards specialised higher learning. The university strives for the convergence of accreditation standards and quality benchmarks in raising its position in domestic and foreign university rankings. It strives for providing modern learning conditions in line with modern standards for staff members and students. It is equipped with modern facilities and modern infrastructure and supports extensive services. It is capable of recruiting prominent staff members while designing learning programmes in line with its core principles. By offering multiple learning opportunities, the university establishes a vibrant learning environment, improving performance and supporting related deanships and administrative units.

For staff development, overseas and domestic learning opportunities are provided in the form of scholarships and training sessions for learning and skill improvement. Various programs are available for supporting learning and career preparation for students in learning spaces and career readiness training programs specifically targeting them for readiness in the future. The Technical College at Al-Kharj commenced operations in 1423 AH with three training departments, aiming to equip Saudi citizens with vocational skills for national development. Responding to community needs, the college expanded its departments from three to eight, covering specialised vocational training areas.

### ***The Impact of Modern Technologies on Education in Al-Kharj Governorate***

The COVID-19 crisis impacted global operations and fundamentally redesigned learning in a way that shifted learning in-person to online modes. The shift, backed by advanced platforms and digital tools, redesigned learning practices worldwide, as in Al-Kharj Governorate. Remote learning had extensive application in the governorate during the crisis and extended to include application in cases related to post-crisis emergencies. Technology-based practices have since come to dominate learning and testing in male and female schools in the governorate. Technology application in Al-Kharj learning system enhanced learning and career prospects for students by providing them with a learning space responsive to emerging trends and society demands. Technology not only transformed learning processes but also administrative processes. As opposed to relying on paper-based processes, learning administration in Al-Kharj fully automated processes and procedures. The shift towards digital processes intensified efficiency, ensuring technology not only supports learning but optimizes managerial and governance processes in schools.

### ***The Role of Education in Economic Development in Al-Kharj***

Education is a major force in driving economic advancement, shaping society's future, society at large, and nations in general. Its influence is not in learning but in bestowing indispensable skill and values upon which improvement at individual and societal level is established. Education in Al-Kharj is a source of expertise and key contributor towards governorate-level improvement. It has played a key contribution towards poverty relief in as far as it creates jobs, increases earnings and lives standards. Education played a key contribution in decision-making in industry and commerce, creating innovative and entrepreneurial thinking—a key ingredient in industry and economy advancement. By equipping human beings with required information and expertise, education in Al-Kharj stimulates idea generation and industry improvement, and enterprise. Overall, education in Al-Kharj exerts a profound influence in economic, social, and cultural processes and is a top enabler for sustainable improvement.

### ***Anticipating the Future: Opportunities and Challenges***

Following this review, several opportunities can be identified for the advancement of education in Al-Kharj, alongside challenges that may affect their realisation. The education sector in Al-Kharj benefits from strong state support, which contributes to the overall development of the Kingdom (Singh & Alwaqaa, 2023). Progress in this area has been driven by the enhancement of schooling frameworks, the introduction of advanced educational tools, and the expansion of universities, colleges, and technical institutions (Abdul-Baset & Al-Mahi, 2024). Among top priorities following the COVID-19 pandemic have been providing electronic learning infrastructure in place of or alongside regular schools and classrooms and digital learning platforms. The presence of Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University provides vocational and academic opportunities for the students and forms potential alliances for vocational and technical training in collaboration with the private sector (Islam & Khan, 2024). It is another source of employment for graduates in the form of training programs and hiring schemes in collaboration with

private organizations.

### **Challenges**

Variation in quality at schools and colleges is reflective of the necessity for urgent improvement in designing curricula in line with today's demands and in bringing advanced technology in the system. Institutions continue to follow old learning modes since there is little innovative thinking in instructional methodology and in recruiting trained staff for specialised fields. It is equally important to have a balanced and secure learning system and constantly improve student service. The solutions for problems are workshops, regular training programs, skill training for instructional and administrative staff, and reinforcing cooperation and information exchanges with partner universities.

### **Conclusion**

The study highlighted that in Al-Kharj, learning commenced with little structured frameworks, starting in the form of sessions studying the Quran, writing classes, and sessions studying Hadith. On unification, there arose increased formally equipped schools for females and males. As time advanced, scientific schools, farming schools, vocational schools, and technical schools came to be established, while female colleges evolved to be known as Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, spreading academic influence to broader spheres. The trends are reflective of a promising future for learning in Al-Kharj, as there are schemes in place for ongoing learning, nearly completed college buildings in new colleges, planned specialised programmes, and a network of vocational schools in emergence. Education played a major driving force in the economy and society in the region in generating jobs, raising skill, and creating invention and enterprise. By looking towards learning in the future and tackling potential problems, Al-Kharj is in good position to keep pace in a constantly evolving world.

### **Recomenditions**

1. Increased Investment in Education: Greater financial support is needed to advance both formal and vocational education, aligning educational programmes with local and national economic demands.
2. Enhancement of Digital Infrastructure: Strengthening online learning capabilities and integrating modern technologies into teaching practices will improve knowledge dissemination and accessibility.
3. Curriculum Development and Innovation: Addressing disparities in educational quality requires curricula that align with contemporary needs and incorporate innovative pedagogical approaches.
4. Teacher and Administrative Training: Well-structured training programmes should enhance the qualifications of educators and administrative staff, equipping them with innovative teaching methods and technological skills.
5. Stronger Educational-Private Sector Collaboration: Strengthening partnerships with the private sector will create more opportunities for students and better prepare them for the job market.
6. Inclusivity and Equal Educational Opportunities: Expanding educational access for both boys and girls should remain a priority, supported by continuous improvements in student services and a safe, stimulating learning environment.

### **Study Implications**

This report presents the remarkable improvement in education in Al-Kharj, stressing the necessity for increased investment in vocational and formal training. The promising future envisaged in current schemes should be taken as a guideline for future plans for further improvement in education. The link between education and economic development in Al-Kharj underscores the importance of strengthening educational infrastructure to drive economic growth. Education policies must include learning improvement in conjunction with broader economic policies, particularly in cultivating entrepreneur and innovative thinking. From a social equity perspective, improved learning opportunities for boys and girls have played a key part in ensuring inclusiveness. The future must be about consolidating and augmenting this inclusiveness in ensuring equal opportunities for learning for all strata in society. The encouragement of vocational and technical training, as well as specialised programmes, is a sustainable method for addressing labour market demands. The matching of training

programmes to domestic and local priorities is still key to sustaining in the longer term. The research paves the way for future research on how some learning programmes affect Al-Kharj's economy and society. The impact on other aspects and contribution to regional development can be analysed in future research in supporting the upward trend in learning in Al-Kharj.

### Study Limitations

This research encompasses a wide time period in history, tracing back history in Al-Kharj since its origin to the present time. However, limitations in continuity and quality in available history, particularly in past ages, may have affected completeness in capturing learning practices and buildings history. Also, as this research is based specifically on Al-Kharj, findings may not be generalizable across different locations. The unique socio-economic and learning circumstances in Al-Kharj may be different than in other locations, and hence generalizations beyond this location may be problematic.

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