



THE EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN SAUDI ARABIA: DEVELOPMENTS IN BASIC AND HIGHER EDUCATION (1960-2024)

Dr. Saud G Albeshir:

Head of the Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, King Saud University, KSA

***Corresponding Author: Dr. Saud G Albeshir**

Abstract:

This study aims to explore the key developments and changes in women's education in Saudi Arabia from 1960 to 2024. The researcher adopted both the historical and documentary approaches to address the study's central question regarding the stages and evolution of women's education. The findings revealed that in 1960, formal schooling for girls was minimal, with only 15 schools, all of which were private. At that time, traditional non-formal education (known as kuttab) was the primary option for families who wished to educate their daughters. The study revealed that formal education for Saudi women began with the establishment of the General Presidency for Girls' Education in 1959. This organization initially opened elementary schools for girls and later expanded to include teacher training institutes, as well as intermediate and secondary schools. The study also showed that there was a clear administrative and organizational separation between male and female education; the Ministry of Education managed boys' schools, while the Presidency supervised girls' schools until their merger into the Ministry of Education in 2002. Regarding higher education, the study highlighted that King Saud University opened admission to female students in 1961 for the first time. In 1970, the first women's college was established in Riyadh, and in 2006, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, the world's largest women's university, was founded. The study concluded that women's education in Saudi Arabia has achieved remarkable progress between 1960 and 2024. The number of formal schools increased from just 15 to more than 19,000, while female students' completion rates for secondary education and enrollment

in higher education institutions surpassed those of males. Furthermore, the number of women in higher education has exceeded that of men, reflecting the tremendous transformations in women's education and its vital role in national development.

Keywords: development of education in Saudi Arabia, formal education, women's education in Saudi Arabia, girls' education, history of education

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Introduction:

Since the early twentieth century, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has embarked on a gradual path toward establishing formal education. In 1926, the Directorate of Education was founded to take responsibility for establishing public schools for boys across the country, which at that time lacked modern educational services (Al-Ghamdi, 2000; Al-Salman, 1999; Al-Zahrani, 2006). During this period, girls' education remained excluded due to prevailing cultural and social traditions (Al-Askari, & Al-Jubouri 2024; Al-Salman, 1999; Al-Zahrani, 2006). However, 1959 marked a pivotal turning point with the announcement of the establishment of the General Presidency for Girls' Education as the official body responsible for organizing and supervising female education. Despite the considerable reservations held by a large segment of the conservative society—driven by fears that schooling for girls might contradict traditional values—the government proceeded with steady steps to expand public schools for girls, even in the face of reluctance by some families to enroll their daughters in the early stages (Albeshir, 2025; Al-Salman, 1999; Al-Zahrani, 2006). Over time, these schools earned the trust of society, and parents became increasingly eager to register their daughters. Teaching also emerged as one of the most sought-after professions for Saudi women, given its high social status, attractive financial return, and stable work environment. From their inception until today, girls' schools have maintained gender segregation across all stages—primary, intermediate, and secondary—with some recent pilot programs introducing boys into the first four grades of primary School within girls' schools, a practice still under evaluation and not yet widely adopted (; Al-Zahrani, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2025). Between 1960 and 2024, the Kingdom achieved remarkable milestones in women's education. Saudi women have excelled academically at various levels, with enrollment and graduation rates from higher education surpassing those of men. This reflects a profound social transformation that has strengthened belief in women's capabilities and empowered them to participate actively in national development (General Authority for Statistics, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2025).

Research Problem:

Despite the significant progress made by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in women's education over recent decades, there remains a scarcity of scholarly research documenting this journey, particularly in English. This study, therefore, aims to examine the developments in Saudi women's education across all stages—pre-university and university—between 1960 and 2024, highlighting the key factors influencing this transformation and its broader social and economic implications.

Research Question:

How has women's Education in Saudi Arabia evolved between 1960 and 2024, and what have been its most significant milestones?

Study Methodology:

The study used a historical approach to address its research question. It also employed descriptive and analytical methods to interpret the results. To answer these question, the study reviewed history books, official documents, scientific studies, and newspapers.

Study objectives:

- To document the historical development of women's education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 1960 to 2024, highlighting the significant milestones and fundamental transformations witnessed in this field.
- To analyze quantitative and qualitative indicators related to the expansion of educational opportunities for women.

Results:**First: Developments in women's education within Saudi Arabia's basic education institutions (1960–2024)**

Before the launch of formal girls' schooling in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the early 1960s, female education was primarily based on women's kuttab—traditional, informal learning institutions often held in the homes of female teachers or designated neighborhood spaces. These kuttab emerged within a cultural and social environment that strictly preserved privacy and gender segregation, where women taught girls in closed, safe settings aligned with religious values and local customs. The curricula in these kuttab were modest in resources but essential in content, focusing mainly on the reading and memorization of the Holy Qur'an, spelling, and basic arithmetic in its four operations. Religious subjects such as fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), tawhid (monotheism), and the biography of the Prophet (seerah) were also taught. In some kuttab, practical skills like sewing, embroidery, and needlework were included. In contrast, a few exceptional institutions—such as the kuttab of al-Ustadhah al-Hazzaziyyah in Mecca—introduced basic foreign language instruction, including English, Italian, and Urdu.

The teaching tools were simple: wooden tablets, pens made from tree branches, and handmade ink. Instructional methods relied heavily on rote learning, repetition, and oral memorization.

Mecca, owing to its religious significance and urban character, witnessed a particularly vibrant movement in establishing women's kuttab, led by numerous pioneering female educators. Notable examples include:

- Kuttab Fatimah Hanem al-Turkiyah (1902), located in the Ajyad district near the General Hospital. It operated for more than thirty years, offering Qur'an, religious sciences, arithmetic, and handicrafts to around fifty students.
- Kuttab Khayriyah Khawjah (1910), also in Ajyad, focusing on Qur'an, religious sciences, arithmetic, and spelling, with 20–30 students.
- Kuttab Aminah Hanem al-Bursaliyyah (1912) in Bi'rBalilah, providing Qur'an, religious sciences, and arithmetic for about twenty years.

- Al-Sawlatiyyah Girls' School (1921) in Harat al-Bab, which lasted until 1963, enrolling around 140 students with four teachers by the time it closed.
- Kuttab Ruqayyah Sambawah (1929) in Bi'rBalilah, which operated for more than forty years and served 40–50 students (Maqaddami, 1985).

With the unification of the Kingdom in 1932, new initiatives appeared:

- Kuttab al-Faqihah Fatimah al-Baghdadiyyah in Jabal al-Sab' Banat, Ajyad, offering Qur'an, arithmetic, seerah, religious sciences, and handicrafts to 50–60 students.
- Kuttab Aminah Rambo al-Jawiyyah (1946) in Zuqaq al-Ma'atiq, teaching Qur'an, spelling, arithmetic, cooking, and sewing to 60–70 students.
- The mid-to-late 1940s saw further establishments:
- Kuttab' A'ishahMa'junniyyah in Suwaiqah near Bab al-Ziyadah, combining Qur'an, arithmetic, fiqh, tailoring, embroidery, and cooking, with 60–70 students.
- Kuttab al-Ustadhah al-Hazzaziyyah in the home of the Al-Kandawani family, al-Safa district, notable for including Italian, English, and Urdu basics, with 30–40 students.
- Kuttab Mudhi al-Damigh in Bi'r al-Hamam, Sha'b' Amir, which continued until the early 1970s, with over twenty students.

In the early 1950s:

- Kuttab Fatimah al-Mandiliyyah behind Ajyad Hospital, with 30–40 students.
- Kuttab Zaynab Qawqu al-Jawiyyah in Suwaiqah, Bab al-Diraybah, with similar numbers.
- Kuttab Bint al-Shaykh al-Nahdi in al-Shamiyyah at Dar al-Buqari, offering Qur'an, handwriting, arithmetic, needlework, and embroidery.

Other kuttab in Mecca included Kuttab Shaiqah al-Shaykh Husayn Makki (circa 1960), Kuttab al-Sayyidah Ashiyah, and Kuttab al-Shamiyyah for Girls, both dating back to the early 20th century. These institutions, though limited in resources, provided the foundational literacy, religious knowledge, and life skills that paved the way for the eventual acceptance and establishment of formal girls' Education in Saudi Arabia (Maqaddami, 1985).

Women's Kuttab and the Transition to Semi-Formal Schooling in Saudi Arabia

Women's kuttab were not limited to Mecca; they also flourished in other cities and regions across the Kingdom. In Medina, for example, Kuttab Fatimah Hanem and Kuttab Fakhriyah Hanem operated from the early 20th century. In Riyadh, there were girls' kuttab alongside boys' kuttab, although the names of the female teachers were not documented. In Jeddah, well-known institutions included Kuttab al-Faqih, Kuttab Khadijah al-Shamiyyah, and Kuttab al-'Amya'. In smaller towns and regions, these schools were led by pioneering women whose names remain part of local educational history. In Al-Zulfi, teachers such as Umm al-Ghudayan, Hessa al-Saad, Hessa al-Obaid, Sarah al-Mabrouk, Salma al-Saeedan, Lulwa al-Durweesh, and Munirah al-Hunaini were known for their work in education in Buraidah. Female educators included Haila al-Saif, Umm al-Hazza', Bint Satam, Umm al-Dukhayli, and Umm al-Fawzan. In Unaizah, kuttab were run by Aisha al-Suwail, Fatimah al-Bilal, Noura al-Humaida, Hessa al-Jabr,

Munirah al-Ali al-Qa'an, Noura al-Qa'is, and Noura al-Ruhait. In Hail, well-known educators included Haila, Bint Haila Noura, Haya al-Salih, and Fatimah al-Ghazi.

These women's kuttab formed a solid educational foundation for Saudi women before the emergence of formal schooling. They played a vital role in spreading literacy and knowledge among women and girls, preparing society socially and culturally to accept the state-run girls' schools later established by the General Presidency for Girls' Education in 1960. The transition was relatively smooth, thanks to the educational experience the kuttab had established—a model that preserved cultural privacy while meeting the growing demand for learning (Al-Rahili, & Al-Sarhani, 2012).

The semi-formal or home-based school stage in girls' education, which began in 1941 and lasted until 1959, marked the beginning of formal public schooling for girls with the opening of the first state-run schools. This period served as a transitional phase between the traditional kuttab system and the modern formal school structure. Around fifteen such semi-formal schools emerged in different parts of the Kingdom, laying the groundwork for the advancement of women's Education institutions were often located within royal palaces or private homes and operated under the direct supervision of leading figures and members of the royal family, which gave them social legitimacy at a time when public sentiment toward girls' Education cautious.

Among the most notable examples was the Princesses' School (Madrasat Kareemat al-Malik Saud) in Riyadh, founded in 1951 inside the royal palace by King Saud—may God have mercy on him—for the education of his daughters and the daughters of the royal family. In 1956, King Faisal—may God have mercy on him—established Dar al-Hanan School in Jeddah to care for orphaned girls, entrusting its administration to his wife, Princess Effat. This School was among the first to integrate academic education with social care. In 1957, Mabarrat al-Kareemat was opened in Riyadh as a shelter for orphan girls before being transformed into the city's first girls' School. In 1958, Mabarrat King Abdulaziz was founded within his palace in the Al-Murabba' district of Riyadh, under the direction of Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz. These semi-formal schools followed curricula similar to those of boys' education, incorporating subjects tailored to girls, such as sewing, tailoring, and embroidery. In some cases, they even included music and physical activities like swimming—additions that were unusual for traditional education at the time. The teaching staff primarily consisted of female educators from neighboring Arab countries, such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine, who brought with them modern pedagogical practices and valuable educational experience.

This stage marked a critical turning point in the history of women's Education in Saudi Arabia, paving the way for broader public acceptance of formal schooling for girls and establishing the foundation upon which the state's modern girls' education system was later built.

By the late 1950s, a new chapter was unfolding in the history of women's education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The state had resolved to establish formal schools for girls under its direct supervision—a step unprecedented in a society long accustomed to limiting female education to women's kuttab schools or informal home-based instruction. Initially, this move encountered strong public opposition from segments of society who regarded formal schooling for girls as a departure from established traditions. Such resistance was not unexpected; neighboring countries had faced similar reactions when initiating female education, often accompanied by deep skepticism regarding its value and potential impact on prevailing social and religious norms.

Nevertheless, the Saudi government, convinced of the critical role of women's education in national development, persisted in implementing its plan. At the same time, it acknowledged the social sensitivities surrounding the issue and granted families the choice of whether or not to send their

daughters to School. This gradual and voluntary approach helped ease public fears and prepare society to accept the idea over time.

Before the official launch of the public girls' education system in 1959, an important transitional phase had emerged: home-based or semi-formal schools, which had appeared as early as 1941 and continued until the late 1950s. Approximately fifteen of these schools operated in cities such as Riyadh, Jeddah, and others, bridging the gap between traditional and formal education. They were often run within royal palaces or large private residences, under the supervision of members of the royal family or prominent social figures, lending them both legitimacy and broader acceptance. Notable examples include the Kareemat King Saud School in Riyadh, founded in 1951 inside the royal palace to educate the King's daughters and other royal family members, offering a secure and private environment for learning. In Jeddah, King Faisal—may he rest in peace—established Dar Al-Hanan in 1956 to care for and educate orphaned girls, entrusting its administration to his wife, Princess Effat Al-Thunayan, who played a key role in shaping its academic programs. Other initiatives included the Kareemat Charity in Riyadh in 1957, initially a shelter for orphaned girls that later became the city's first girls' School, and the King Abdulaziz Charity, founded in 1958 within his palace in Riyadh's Al-Murabba district under the direction of Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz.

These semi-formal schools adopted curricula similar to those used in boys' education; however, they incorporated subjects tailored for girls, such as sewing, tailoring, and embroidery, and in some cases, music and physical education, including swimming. They also employed female teaching staff from Arab countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine, adding a level of professional rigor and modernity to their teaching methods. This transitional period was crucial in acclimating society to the idea of girls attending organized institutions with structured curricula and formal administration, paving the way for the establishment of the first government-run girls' schools in 1959—marking the beginning of a new era in Saudi women's Education. It is equally important, before discussing the public girls' school era, to acknowledge the philanthropic efforts of pioneering women in organizing female Education in Saudi Arabia, foremost among them, Princess Effat Al-Thunayan. As the wife of King Faisal, Princess Effat emerged as a central figure in advancing women's education, particularly during the semi-formal school period. From the outset, she believed that educating girls was fundamental to societal progress and worked tirelessly to provide a safe learning environment that respected religious and cultural values. In 1955, she established Dar Al-Hanan in Jeddah, the first women's School to combine academic instruction with social care for orphaned girls. The School offered modern curricula and employed experienced female teachers from both Saudi Arabia and abroad. This initiative became a pioneering model that helped break down social barriers, raise public awareness of the importance of girls' education, and set the stage for the expansion of public girls' schools in later years. Princess Effat's enlightened Vision and steadfast commitment to women's right to learn left a lasting educational and cultural legacy in the national memory, making Dar Al-Hanan the starting point for a new era in Saudi women's education. In recognition of her contributions, a university for women was established in her name in 1999 (Al-Salman, 1999; Albeshir et al., 2025; Al-Zahrani, 2006; Al-Sheikh, 2021; Al-Askari & Al-Jubouri, 2021).

The Launch of Formal Girls' Education in Saudi Arabia

Until 1959, there was no official authority responsible for supervising girls' Education in Saudi Arabia. Although the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Knowledge at the time) had existed since 1926, its mandate was limited exclusively to male education (Al-Zahrani, 2006). This arrangement reflected the prevailing social climate, where sensitivity toward women's education was high. Many segments of society viewed formal schooling for girls with suspicion, preferring to keep female education in its traditional forms—such as kuttab schools and home-based learning circles. These reservations were rooted in a mix of social and cultural concerns, with some fearing that formal schools might lead to a decline in girls' morals or undermine long-established customs and traditions. To overcome this resistance, the Saudi government adopted a deliberate strategy aimed at reassuring the public and dispelling such fears. A key

step in this process was involving prominent religious scholars in the supervision of girls' education, trusting them with monitoring educational activities and establishing regulations to ensure that formal schooling aligned with the Kingdom's religious and cultural values.

The new administrative body's responsibilities included establishing public schools for girls across the Kingdom, while emphasizing that the goal was not to alter the nation's social or religious identity but to contribute to enlightening society and developing its human capital through education. At that time, the number of formal girls' schools in Saudi Arabia was fewer than twenty, all of which were private, highlighting the minimal educational opportunities available to girls during the early stages of women's education in the Kingdom. A decisive turning point came with the royal decree issued on Thursday, October 22, 1959, establishing a dedicated authority for girls' education under the name General Presidency for Girls' Education. The decree set out specific conditions: Schools would provide instruction in religious sciences alongside other subjects through Islamic teachings.

- A supervisory board would be formed under the leadership of the Grand Mufti, Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Al Al-Sheikh, to oversee and regulate these schools.
- Female teachers would be selected based on sound religious beliefs and strong personal faith.
- The emphasis on Islamic principles was clear in the administration, teacher selection, and curriculum design. Since its inception—and continuing to the present—Saudi Education has placed great importance on Islamic studies and has refrained from teaching any subject matter that contradicts Islamic teachings and values (Al-Zahrani, 2006; Umm Al-Qura Newspaper, 1959).

Kindergartens in Saudi Arabia

The journey of public kindergartens in Saudi Arabia began in 1975, marking a pioneering step in the development of early childhood education. This initiative aimed to prepare children for formal schooling by nurturing their social, emotional, and cognitive skills during the most formative years of their lives. At the time, the General Presidency for Girls' Education gave special attention to this stage, recognizing its crucial role in shaping well-rounded individuals from an early age. In contrast to the later stages of elementary, intermediate, and secondary, which were strictly segregated by gender, kindergartens in their early years were co-educational, bringing together young boys and girls in the same classrooms.

The early 1980s witnessed steady growth in the number of kindergartens, teachers, and enrolled children. By the 1982/1983 academic year, 224 kindergartens were employing 1,583 teachers and serving 41,202 children. The following year, 1983/1984, saw a noticeable increase to 274 kindergartens, 2,298 teachers, and 47,197 children. This expansion continued through the mid-1980s:

- In 1984/1985, there were 436 kindergartens, 2,275 teachers, and 47,494 children.
- In 1985/1986, the number rose to 492 kindergartens, 3,001 teachers, and 51,604 children.
- By 1986/1987, the figures reached 551 kindergartens, 3,487 teachers, and 66,090 children.
- In 1987/1988, there were 534 kindergartens, 3,560 teachers, and 66,974 children.

A brief decline occurred in 1988/1989, when the number of kindergartens dropped to 500, and the teaching staff decreased to 3,504, serving 63,931 children. However, the sector rebounded quickly in 1989/1990, with 551 kindergartens, 4,521 teachers, and 77,940 children. The 1990s brought continued

expansion despite occasional fluctuations. In 1991/1992, the number of kindergartens reached 608, serving 71,323 children with 4,405 teachers. By 1993/1994, the figures had climbed to 752 kindergartens, 5,503 teachers, and 85,415 children. The mid-1990s marked a further leap, with 966 kindergartens in 1995/1996, enrolling 86,452 children. By the late 1990s, early childhood education had firmly established its place in the Kingdom's educational system. In 1997/1998, there were 1,072 kindergartens, 8,054 teachers, and 91,352 children. Although 1998/1999 saw a slight drop to 962 kindergartens and 7,511 teachers, the number of children rose to 93,942—reflecting a sustained and growing demand for this educational stage. This historical progression illustrates how kindergartens evolved from a modest initiative into a vital component of Saudi Arabia's education system. Despite occasional setbacks, the steady enrollment growth underscored the increasing recognition among families and policymakers alike of the importance of early childhood education as the foundation for lifelong learning and as a bridge to the formal stages of schooling (Al-Zahrani, 2006; Al-Sheikh, 2021; Al-Askari & Al-Jubouri, 2021; Al-Rahili, & Al-Sarhani, 2012; Mohammed, 2016).

Primary Schools for Girls

In Saudi Arabia, from the early days of formal education in the Kingdom to the present, the girls' public school system has maintained a highly centralized structure. Curricula, regulations, policies, and administrative procedures are standardized across all regions, and the appointment of female teachers has historically been managed centrally by the national education authority. The year 1960 marked the formal launch of the General Presidency for Girls' Education, which succeeded in establishing 15 public primary schools for girls along with an institute for teacher training. The allocated budget at the time was nearly two million Saudi riyals. These schools housed 127 classrooms and enrolled 5,180 students, taught by 113 teachers—most of whom came from Arab countries with relatively advanced educational systems at that period, such as Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. Within just a few years, the Kingdom experienced a sharp rise in the number of girls' primary schools. By 1965, there were 160 schools with over 1,623 classrooms, enrolling 50,870 students and staffed by 1,932 teachers. By 1970, the numbers had grown to 357 schools with 3,645 classrooms, serving more than 127,000 students and employing 4,353 teachers. The mid-1970s saw a remarkable leap. In 1975, the number of primary schools reached 963, with 8,037 classrooms and over 230,000 students, while the number of teachers surpassed 10,000—a sign of wider societal acceptance of girls' education just the second decade after its official launch. By 1980, the number of schools had almost doubled to 1,810, containing over 14,000 classrooms and enrolling more than 340,000 students, taught by 18,885 teachers. Expansion continued through the 1980s, and by 1985, there were 3,155 schools with 25,564 classrooms, serving more than 500,000 students and staffed by over 33,000 teachers. This growth paralleled a period of rapid population increase and nationwide economic and urban development. By 1990, there were 3,527 schools with 33,037 classrooms, enrolling 760,510 students and employing 44,817 teachers. The upward trend continued into the late 1990s; in 1998, the number of schools reached 5,156, with more than 46,000 classrooms and close to one million students, supported by 76,000 teachers (Al-Zahrani, 2006; Al-Askari & Al-Jubouri, 2021; Al-Rahili, & Al-Sarhani, 2012; Mohammed, 2016).

Intermediate Schools for Girls in Saudi Arabia

The intermediate stage of girls' education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was officially launched in 1964 with the opening of only four public schools, comprising a total of 13 classrooms and enrolling 235 students. During the early years, signs of expansion quickly emerged. By 1970, the number of girls' intermediate schools had grown to 17, containing 222 classrooms and serving 7,861 students, taught by 384 teachers. The mid-1970s marked a significant leap in the spread of this educational stage. By 1975, there were 120 schools across various regions of the Kingdom, housing 1,345 classrooms and enrolling over 46,000 students, with the teaching staff increasing to 2,327 teachers. This rapid growth was driven by the rising number of primary school graduates and an increasing societal awareness of the importance of women's education. In 1980, the expansion had accelerated further, with 407 schools comprising 3,211

classrooms, enrolling more than 85,000 students and staffed by 5,584 teachers. In 1990, the number of schools surpassed the 1,000 mark, reaching 1,041 schools with over 7,600 classrooms, serving more than 200,000 students under the instruction of over 15,000 teachers. By the end of the 1990s, the intermediate stage for girls had firmly established itself as a central component of the national education system. In 1998, the number of schools reached 2,165, with 14,729 classrooms, enrolling more than 400,000 students and staffed by 33,588 teachers—a clear reflection of its entrenched role in the educational structure and the growing public demand for it (Al-Zahrani, 2006; Al-Sheikh, 2021; Al-Askari & Al-Jubouri, 2021; Al-Rahili, & Al-Sarhani, 2012; Mohammed, 2016).

Girls' Secondary Education in Saudi Arabia

Girls' secondary education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia began in 1963 when the General Presidency for Girls' Education opened the first public secondary School for girls, attached to the Riyadh Model Institute. In its first year, the School enrolled 21 students, a number that increased to 81 within two years. During the early years of the Presidency, the main focus was on expanding primary and intermediate schools, while secondary education for girls was primarily left to the private sector. By 1970, there was one public secondary School for girls, comprising 15 classrooms with 550 students and 23 teachers. As the education system developed and demand for schooling grew, the girls' secondary stage witnessed clear expansion in the following decade. By 1980, the number of secondary schools had reached 27, containing 360 classrooms and serving more than 13,000 students. The teaching staff numbered 603 teachers, the majority of whom were non-Saudis from neighboring Arab countries. In the mid-1980s—specifically in 1985—secondary education expanded significantly, with 124 schools serving over 32,000 students and staffed by 2,241 teachers. This growth continued at an accelerated pace, and by 1990, the number of schools had reached 477, comprising 4,100 classrooms, with more than 80,000 students and 8,086 teachers. By the end of the 1990s, girls' secondary Education Had Reached a peak of expansion for that period. In 1998, there were 1,197 public secondary schools with 9,767 classrooms, enrolling approximately 286,000 students and employing around 23,000 teachers. This remarkable growth firmly established girls' secondary education as one of the central pillars of the Saudi educational system (Al-Zahrani, 2006; Al-Sheikh, 2021; Al-Askari & Al-Jubouri, 2021; Al-Rahili, & Al-Sarhani, 2012; Mohammed, 2016).

Religious Schools for Girls in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Islamic studies constitute an integral part of the curricula in public schools across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Education ensures that subjects such as Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), monotheism (tawhid), creed (aqidah), the Sunnah of the Prophet, and the Holy Qur'an—covering memorization, recitation, and interpretation—are embedded as core components of the educational program. In 1980, a distinctive educational initiative was introduced with the establishment of public schools for girls that placed a stronger emphasis on religious instruction, known as Qur'an Memorization Schools. These institutions paralleled traditional public schools in delivering the full range of academic subjects. However, they were distinguished by allocating greater instructional time and specialized courses to Qur'anic Education, including interpretation (tafsir), recitation rules (tajwid), the sciences of Qur'anic readings (qira'at), as well as Hadith studies. Over time, these schools witnessed substantial expansion, becoming a key component of the Kingdom's female religious education framework. By 1998, at the primary level, there were 253 schools comprising 1,564 classrooms, enrolling 3,286 students and staffed by 2,677 teachers. At the intermediate level, there were 71 schools with 258 classrooms, accommodating 5,493 students taught by 675 teachers. At the secondary level, the system encompassed 42 schools containing 137 classrooms, with 2,541 students and 312 teachers. This notable expansion reflects the pivotal role these institutions have played in strengthening specialized religious education for girls alongside general academic instruction, aligning with the Kingdom's educational and religious priorities. Qur'an Memorization Schools have contributed to producing generations of female graduates proficient in the memorization and understanding of the Qur'an and its sciences, while also well-versed in contemporary academic disciplines—thereby presenting

a holistic model that harmonizes religious authenticity with the requirements of modern education (Al-Zahrani, 2006; Al-Askari & Al-Jubouri, 2021; Al-Rahili, & Al-Sarhani, 2012; Mohammed, 2016).

Literacy Schools and Adult Education for Women

In 1972, the General Presidency for Girls' Education in Saudi Arabia began focusing on providing educational opportunities for older women by opening five specialized schools dedicated to adult education. These schools contained 47 classrooms, enrolled 1,400 female students, and were staffed by 47 teachers. This initiative represented a significant step toward enabling women to pursue education throughout their lives, thereby broadening the demographic reach of the educational system. The program quickly expanded. By 1975, just three years later, the number of adult education schools for women had increased to 458 schools, enrolling over 26,000 students—a clear sign of the program's success and the community's acceptance of educational opportunities for women at all life stages. By 1985, the number of literacy and adult education schools had surpassed 1,500, reaching 1,547 schools with 5,221 classrooms, serving around 62,000 students and employing 4,651 teachers. By the late 1990s, these schools had spread to nearly every region of the Kingdom. In 1998, there were 1,931 schools with 6,848 classrooms, enrolling 68,848 students and staffed by 6,729 teachers. This continued expansion underscored the state's commitment to eradicating illiteracy among women and promoting lifelong learning as part of its broader social and educational development agenda (Al-Zahrani, 2006; Al-Sheikh, 2021; Al-Askari & Al-Jubouri, 2021; Al-Rahili, & Al-Sarhani, 2012; Dahish, 1998; Mohammed, 2016).

Education for Female Students with Disabilities

The education of female students with disabilities in Saudi Arabia began in 1964 with the establishment of the first institute for blind girls in Riyadh, followed by an institute for deaf girls in the same city. Initially, the Ministry of Education oversaw schools and programs for students with disabilities, both male and female. In 1995, the responsibility for supervising special education programs and schools for girls was transferred to the General Presidency for Girls' Education, to enhance the autonomy and development of services for this group. At the time of the transfer, there were 18 schools for female students with disabilities, comprising 370 classrooms and serving nearly 5,000 students. In the following years, the sector experienced significant growth. By 1998, the number of such schools had risen to 25, containing 412 classrooms and enrolling over 6,000 students. These schools were staffed by 877 teachers and 239 administrators, providing specialized academic and rehabilitation services tailored to the needs of female students with disabilities. This progress reflected the Kingdom's dedication to integrating female students with disabilities into the educational process and providing them with a supportive learning environment that meets both their academic and developmental needs (Al-Mousa, 2008; Dahish, 1998).

Private Education and Its Role in Women's Education in Saudi Arabia

By the late 1950s, Saudi Arabia was on the threshold of a significant transformation in women's education. The government moved toward establishing formal schools for girls under its direct supervision. This step was bold and unprecedented in a society where, for many years, girls' education had been confined to kuttab-style instruction or home-based schools. Understandably, the idea initially faced public resistance from segments of society who feared that girls' schooling might challenge prevailing traditions. However, the government, driven by a firm belief in the importance of women's education in nation-building, insisted on moving forward with its historic project—while granting families the freedom to decide whether or not to send their daughters to school. This gradual approach helped prepare society, ease apprehensions, and pave the way for the opening of the first public girls' schools in 1959, marking the beginning of a new era in female education. Before this official launch, private education played a crucial preparatory role that cannot be overlooked. Since the early 1940s, home-based and semi-formal schools have served as a bridge between traditional and modern education. These schools were often established within royal palaces or the homes of prominent social figures and operated under the direct supervision of members of the royal family or respected women in society, earning broad community acceptance. Among the most notable examples were Princesses' School

(Kareemat Al-Malik Saud) in Riyadh, Dar Al-Hanan School in Jeddah, founded by Princess Effat, wife of King Faisal, as well as Mabarrat Al-Kareemat and Mabarrat King Abdulaziz in Riyadh. These institutions adopted curricula similar to those used in boys' schools but supplemented with subjects tailored to girls. They also recruited female teachers from other Arab countries, giving their programs a more professional and modern character. Today, more than six decades after the launch of formal girls' education, it continues to play a significant role in supporting the advancement of Saudi women—albeit in a different context, shaped by new challenges and opportunities. In 2024, the number of private girls' schools reached 2,779, enrolling 322,020 students and staffed by 29,059 teachers alongside 4,347 administrators. These figures reflect the substantial presence and ongoing contribution of private education in the Kingdom's educational landscape (Al-Jazirah Newspaper, 2011;21.Saudi Press Agency,2005;Ministry of Education, 2025;General Authority for Statistics, 2025;Dahish,1998)

Teacher Training Institutes in Saudi Arabia

In 1961, the General Presidency for Girls' Education in Saudi Arabia took a pioneering step toward building a qualified female teaching workforce by establishing several teacher training institutes. Initially, these institutes operated at the intermediate level, admitting female students who had completed primary School, with a study period of three years. The first institutes were opened in Riyadh, Medina, Taif, and Jeddah, to supply girls' primary schools with well-trained teachers. Over time, these institutes expanded steadily in number, reaching 29 institutes by 1973, reflecting the growing demand for female teachers as formal girls' education expanded across the Kingdom. Development was not limited to quantitative growth; it also included curriculum improvements, enhanced training programs, and modernized teaching methods tailored to the needs of the educational field. Admission requirements were upgraded to meet the demands of different educational stages. Alongside institutes preparing primary school teachers, secondary school teacher training institutes were introduced, requiring applicants to hold an intermediate school certificate, raising the academic standard of graduates from these institutions. By 1986, the number of teacher training institutes had risen to 88, distributed across various regions, forming a crucial foundation for preparing female educators who played a central role in strengthening and expanding girls' education nationwide. In the mid-1990s, these institutes were gradually phased out. Some were converted into intermediate colleges offering higher academic degrees, while others became colleges of education merged into Saudi universities. This transition reflected a broader policy shift toward modernizing teacher preparation programs and elevating their academic standards in line with the Kingdom's educational reform and modernization plans (Al-Jazirah Newspaper, 2011;21.Saudi Press Agency,2005).

The Merger of the General Presidency for Girls' Education with the Ministry of Education

The royal decree issued in 2002 by King Fahd bin Abdulaziz, mandating the merger of the General Presidency for Girls' Education with the Ministry of Education (formerly the Ministry of Knowledge), represented a pivotal turning point in the history of women's Education in Saudi Arabia. This decision marked the end of a long-standing administrative separation between male and female education, bringing the entire educational process under a unified institutional framework. It allowed for the harmonization of policies, plans, and curricula, as well as the modernization of educational administration in alignment with national priorities. From an administrative standpoint, the merger created a more cohesive environment across educational sectors by eliminating duplication of functions, strengthening coordination mechanisms, and improving operational efficiency and decision-making speed. From an academic perspective, girls' curricula underwent comprehensive reviews, resulting in redesigned educational content aligned with national standards, enriched with updated scientific and technological material, and supported by the integration of modern teaching technologies into classrooms. The reform also had a direct impact on teacher professional development, as female educators gained access to training and professional growth programs offered by the Ministry of Education, which contributed to

raising both academic and administrative competencies. In terms of infrastructure, girls' schools experienced a qualitative leap with the establishment and upgrading of science laboratories, specialized libraries, and computer labs—facilities designed to meet the demands of contemporary education effects of the merger extended beyond the school system to higher Education expanded academic disciplines for female students in advanced scientific and technical fields, as well as broader opportunities to participate in overseas scholarship programs. Moreover, the decision strengthened women's roles in shaping educational policy and participating in educational decision-making positions, in harmony with national trends toward women's empowerment. In sum, the merger of the General Presidency for Girls' Education with the Ministry of Education was not merely an administrative measure—it was a strategic transformation that accelerated the modernization of women's Education in Saudi Arabia and embedded it within a comprehensive national vision aimed at enhancing women's roles, developing their capabilities, and aligning their education the requirements of sustainable development and the Kingdom's future aspirations(Al-Rahili, & Al-Sarhani,. 2012).

Girls' Education in Saudi Arabia after the Launch of Vision 2030 (2016–2024)

At the beginning of the 21st century, women's Education in Saudi Arabia underwent profound transformations that reshaped its organizational structure and expanded its reach. The most significant milestone in this period was the 2002 merger of the General Presidency for Girls' Education with the Ministry of Education, bringing the supervision of male and female education under a single umbrella. This decision was not merely an administrative adjustment but a strategic move that helped unify educational policies, improve coordination, and achieve integration across different stages of education, thereby enhancing the quality of education for girls.

From a statistical perspective, the early years of the new millennium reflected a steadily growing educational landscape.

- Primary Education (2000–2006): In 2000, there were 1,107,862 female students, 102,176 teachers, and 6,318 schools. By 2006, the numbers had risen to 1,175,783 students, 111,851 teachers, and 7,614 schools, indicating a notable increase in capacity.
- Intermediate Education (2000–2006): In 2000, enrollment reached 494,281 students taught by 44,907 teachers across 2,814 schools. By 2006, these figures grew to 515,803 students, 54,058 teachers, and 3,452 schools.
- Secondary education (000–2006): In 2000, there were 387,001 students, 32,089 teachers, and 1,650 schools. By 2006, enrollment rose to 463,451 students, with 45,374 teachers and 2,189 schools.

These statistics demonstrate that the period from 2000 to 2006 marked an important transitional phase in women's Education in Saudi Arabia. The progress was not limited to expanding the number of schools and students but also involved strengthening administrative structures after the unification of supervisory bodies—laying the groundwork for broader reform efforts that would later be advanced under the framework of Saudi Vision 2030.

Since the launch of Saudi Vision 2030 in 2016, the Kingdom's education sector has entered a new phase of development and transformation characterized by quantitative expansion, qualitative diversification, and an overall elevation in educational standards. Vision 2030 placed women's empowerment and their enhanced participation in sustainable development at the forefront of its priorities, with education as the cornerstone for achieving these objectives.

In 2016, the year Vision 2030 was inaugurated, the total number of girls' schools—both public and private—stood at 17,437, enrolling 3,128,669 students. The teaching workforce included 298,546 female teachers and 91,378 administrators. These figures marked the baseline for a comprehensive development strategy aimed at raising enrollment rates, improving infrastructure, and developing the capacity of the teaching corps.

As the Vision's programs and initiatives were implemented, the girls' education sector began to witness gradual and consistent growth:

- 2017: The number of schools rose to 17,991, with 3,248,444 students enrolled.
- 2018: Schools increased to 18,219, with 3,263,991 students, accompanied by improvements in the distribution of teaching and administrative staff.
- 2019: The number of schools stabilized at 18,285, while attention shifted toward enhancing educational quality through curriculum reviews and modernized teaching methods.
- 2020: A significant rise in student numbers occurred, reaching 3,406,097 across 18,967 schools, reflecting increased capacity and broader access to education for girls across the Kingdom.
- 2021: There were 18,801 schools serving 3,304,937 students, with ongoing upgrades to digital infrastructure and the integration of educational technologies in line with the Vision's digital transformation goals.
- 2022: Schools increased to 18,931, with 3,546,233 students, underscoring sustained momentum in educational expansion.
- 2023: A further leap was recorded, with 19,030 schools and 3,830,095 students, supported by 284,163 teachers, meeting growing demand for school placements.
- 2024: The culmination of eight years of concerted effort under Vision 2030, with 19,505 schools—both public and private—educating 4,001,852 students and staffed by 291,256 teachers and 87,375 administrators.

In 2024, the distribution of girls' schools across educational stages was well-balanced: 5,960 public primary schools, 3,104 public intermediate schools, 4,812 public secondary schools, and 2,779 private schools. Throughout this period, the expansion of girls' education was not merely about increasing numbers—it represented a strategic transformation aimed at enhancing educational quality, preparing women for a competitive labor market, and strengthening their societal roles. These efforts have shifted women's education from a stage of limited growth to one of institutional maturity and programmatic diversity, positioning it as a key driver in achieving the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030 (Al-Askari & Al-Jubouri, 2021; Al-Rahili, & Al-Sarhani, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2025; General Authority for Statistics, 2025; Vision 2030 Document, 2016).

Second: Developments in women's education within Saudi Arabia's higher education institutions (1960–2024)

Women's higher Education in Saudi Arabia has undergone remarkable development over the decades, reflecting the country's social, cultural, and economic transformations. From a very modest beginning—when only a small number of women were admitted to limited fields of study—to a stage of broad openness in which all academic disciplines are available to them, Saudi women have progressed to occupy prominent positions in scientific and research fields. The journey of Saudi women in university education began in the 1961/1962 academic year, when the first cohort of four female students was admitted to King Saud University. Four years later, in 1965, the first Saudi woman graduated from the

university: Fatimah Mandili, who earned a "Very Good" grade in the Department of English. She was appointed as a teaching assistant at the university and later sent on a government scholarship to pursue graduate studies abroad. She became the first Saudi woman to return with a PhD, which she obtained in 1977 from Cairo University. Her dissertation was titled "The Conflict Between Myth and Reality: A Study of the Heroines in the Plays of John Millington Synge" (King Saud University, 1987). In 1967, the first private university in the Kingdom, King Abdulaziz University, was established. That same year, female students were admitted to the College of Economics and Administration there, as well as to the College of Education in Mecca. King Abdulaziz University was later converted into a public institution in Al-Zahrani, 2006;1971(King Saud University 1987;1999

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The early 1970s marked the establishment of dedicated women's colleges, beginning with the College of Education for Women in Riyadh in 1970, followed by the College of Education for Women in Jeddah in 1974, and a similar college in Mecca in 1975. In 1979, the first College of Arts in Riyadh was founded, offering programs in Islamic Studies, Arabic Language and Literature, History, Geography, English, Home Economics, and Mathematics. That same year, the College of Education for Women in Dammam opened. Expansion continued into the early 1980s, with three additional colleges established in Medina, Qassim, and Abha in 1981, and another in Tabuk in 1982. The late 1970s and 1980s also saw the founding of numerous teacher training colleges for women to address the acute shortage of qualified teachers for elementary and intermediate schools. These institutions relied heavily on faculty from other Arab countries, including Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. In 1977, the first graduate programs for women were launched, starting at the College of Education in Riyadh. Over time, the network of women's colleges expanded to more than 70 institutions nationwide, with 23 located in Riyadh alone. The early 2000s witnessed a significant restructuring of higher education, integrating women's colleges into larger university systems and establishing new public universities in smaller cities such as Jazan, Najran, Al-Majma'ah, Qassim, Shaqra, Jeddah, and Hafar Al-Batin. As part of this reorganization, the 23 women's colleges in Riyadh were consolidated into Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, founded in 2006, which is now the largest women's university in the world, with more than 35,000 students. By 2005, the year women's colleges were officially merged into the general university system, cumulative graduation figures stood at 888 PhD holders, 1,407 Master's degree holders, and 196,767 Bachelor's degree graduates. Today, Saudi women have access to nearly all academic programs previously reserved for men, including engineering, which opened to female students in the early 2010s. Women have also been admitted to King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, a historically male-only institution. Recent statistics for 2024 indicate that women's participation in higher education surpasses that of men, with approximately 634,000 female students enrolled in higher education compared to fewer than 470,000 male students(Albeshir, 2025;Princess ; Ministry of Education, 2025;General Authority for Statistics, Al-Zahrani, 2006;2025;Nourahbint Abdulrahman University, 2025;Dahish,1998)

Overseas Scholarships for Saudi Women

Since the dawn of the twenty-first century, a new chapter has emerged in the history of women's Education in Saudi Arabia, most notably characterized by a significant expansion in opportunities for overseas scholarships. Whereas, in earlier decades, the prospect of a Saudi woman traveling abroad for study was rare and generally confined to exceptional cases, these opportunities gradually broadened as societal conviction grew regarding the importance of higher education for women and its role in national development. In the years preceding 2005, the number of female scholarship recipients was minimal. Studying abroad was often linked to accompanying a family member on their scholarship or pursuing graduate studies in traditionally accepted fields such as education and medicine. At the time, the notion of overseas study faced notable social and cultural reservations, with concerns raised about the potential

impact of travel on family traditions and values. Nonetheless, pioneering Saudi women proved their academic merit abroad, helping to shift prevailing perceptions and paving the way for others to follow. The year 2005 marked a turning point with the launch of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Scholarship Program. This initiative brought about a qualitative leap in women's education, granting thousands of female students access to leading universities around the world in disciplines previously inaccessible to them, such as engineering, information technology, law, media, and the arts, alongside advanced scientific and medical fields. The program bolstered public confidence through policies ensuring the presence of a male guardian (mahram) during the study period. This measure encouraged many families to approve their daughters' travel for educational purposes. Over time, the number of female scholarship recipients increased significantly, with Saudi women at times comprising nearly half of all scholarship students. With the advent of Saudi Vision 2030 in 2016, overseas scholarships took on a more strategic dimension. Scholarship opportunities were closely tied to national labor market needs and major developmental priorities, including renewable energy, tourism, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence. Greater emphasis was placed on quality and selectivity, restricting eligibility to top-ranked global universities and rare, high-demand specialties. Furthermore, short-term scholarships and specialized training programs for women were introduced in advanced international institutions. This strategic shift produced remarkable success stories of Saudi women who excelled in scientific research, innovation, and entrepreneurship, and who went on to assume prominent leadership and academic positions both domestically and internationally. Saudi women's participation in prestigious global academic forums has become a testament to their ability to compete and excel in diverse educational and cultural environments. Today, overseas scholarships are no longer merely educational opportunities but have evolved into a strategic instrument for women's empowerment—preparing a generation of female leaders capable of spearheading national projects and contributing to the fulfillment of comprehensive development goals. With continued governmental support and the ongoing evolution of scholarship policies, the influence of Saudi female graduates on shaping the Kingdom's future and its global standing is expected to grow even further (Ministry of Education, 2025).

International Female Students in Saudi Higher Education Institutions

The journey of attracting international female students to Saudi higher education institutions began alongside the early development of university education in the Kingdom. This trajectory can be traced back to 1949 with the establishment of the College of Sharia in Mecca, followed by the founding of the Kingdom's first university, King Saud University, in Riyadh in 1957. The university held its first graduation ceremony in 1961 for a cohort of 21 students, including two international students from Africa. From these beginnings, Saudi public universities committed themselves to hosting both male and female international students, offering them fully funded scholarships provided by the Saudi government. The specific journey of international female students began in 1962 when the first cohort of women was admitted to King Saud University. By 1971, the number of international female students in Saudi higher education institutions had risen to 177, representing approximately 13% of the total international student population at that time. Over the decades, the number and proportion of international female students grew significantly. By 2021, there were 17,417 international female students enrolled in Saudi public universities, making up around 37% of all international students. The past five decades have also witnessed an expansion in attracting students from non-Arab countries. In 1971, there were only two non-Arab international female students—both from Malaysia. In contrast, in later decades, the diversity of nationalities expanded to include students from various Asian, African, and European countries. Beyond the undergraduate level, international students, both male and female, have maintained a strong presence in graduate programs. This trend was especially evident in 2021, when the total number of international students in Saudi Arabia reached approximately 65,000. These figures underscore the role of Saudi universities as a prominent academic destination both regionally and internationally (Albeshir, 2025;; Ministry of Education, 2025; UNESCO, 2024).

Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University: The Largest Women's University in the World

Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University (PNU) in Riyadh stands as the largest women's university in the world, with an enrollment of over 37,000 female students in 2025. The institution's origins date back to 1970, with the establishment of the first women's college in Riyadh under the supervision of the then-General Presidency for Girls' Education. This marked the beginning of a significant expansion in higher education institutions dedicated exclusively to women. Over the years, specialized colleges in education, sciences, humanities, home economics, and health sciences were established, providing Saudi women with broader opportunities for academic advancement. In 2008, the institution underwent a historic transformation when King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz issued a royal decree establishing Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University as a fully integrated campus for female students, uniting all women's colleges in Riyadh under one umbrella. The campus was designed according to the latest international standards, covering more than eight million square meters. It houses over 15 specialized colleges, a university hospital, advanced research centers, and one of the largest central libraries in the region. Since then, PNU has played a pivotal role in advancing Saudi women academically and professionally. Its programs have extended beyond traditional fields to include modern, labor market-driven disciplines such as engineering, information technology, computer science, advanced health sciences, and business administration. The university has also placed strong emphasis on scientific research and entrepreneurship, establishing innovation support centers and business incubators that have enabled many students to transform their ideas into real-world projects. Aligned with Saudi Vision 2030, the university has strengthened its international partnerships with leading educational and research institutions, providing training and scholarship programs that prepare female graduates to compete both locally and globally. It has also launched numerous initiatives to empower women in leadership and administrative roles and to support their participation in key economic sectors. Today, Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University stands as a symbol of successful investment in women's education and a pioneering model in the Arab region, graduating thousands of qualified women each year who contribute to national development and help fulfill the Kingdom's aspirations of building a thriving knowledge-based society (Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, 2025).

Conclusion:

By the late 1950s, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was on the verge of a profound transformation in women's education. The first steps toward formal schooling for girls began with the establishment of private schools, marking the actual starting point for building an integrated women's education system. In 1959, a historic decision was made to establish the General Presidency for Girls' Education, the official body responsible for overseeing girls' Education in Saudi Arabia. This step institutionalized and organized the educational process for females in the country. The year 1961 marked a milestone with the opening of Teacher Training Institutes aimed at preparing specialized female educators. In the same year, Saudi female students were admitted to higher education institutions for the first time, a bold step that opened new horizons for women. In 1962, the scope of educational inclusion expanded to allow the admission of international female students into Saudi higher education institutions, giving women's education in the Kingdom an international dimension. In 1965, history was made when the first Saudi woman, Fatimah Mandili, graduated from a higher education institution, earning an "excellent" grade in the English Language Department. This achievement symbolized a new generation of academically qualified women. In 1967, another milestone was reached with the admission of female students to the College of Medicine at King Saud University for the first time, coinciding with the acceptance of women into private universities, broadening their educational options. In 1970, the first women's college in Saudi Arabia was established, strengthening the institutional framework for women's higher education. From the late 1990s onward, significant quantitative and qualitative shifts occurred: women's secondary school completion rates surpassed those of men, and the same trend was observed in university graduation rates.

Since then, the number and proportion of female students in both general and higher education consistently exceeded those of male students, reflecting a profound societal shift toward supporting women's education. The number of formal girls' schools grew from around 15 in 1950 to over 30,000 schools by 2024—a dramatic expansion representing substantial investment in educational infrastructure. Furthermore, the female illiteracy rate dropped to below 3% by 2023, ranking among the lowest in the Arab world (Ministry of Education, 2025; General Authority for Statistics, 2025). In 2006, a landmark achievement was realized with the inauguration of Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh—the largest women's university in the world—offering advanced academic and research capabilities. Thus, the period from 1960 to 2024 represents a steadily ascending trajectory for women's Education in Saudi Arabia—evolving from modest beginnings in private schools to a vast network of diverse educational institutions. These developments have achieved both quantitative and qualitative progress, positioning Saudi women as active partners in national development and as a scientific and intellectual force on both the local and global stages.

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