



## **Strategic Planning and Higher Educational Development: Challenges and Prospect in the Developing Muslim World**

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### **Abstract**

*The growth and development of any nation over history highly depend on the achievement derived from the fruits of education. Education as argued by many scholars is the bedrock of all civilization, transformation and restructuring of a society from one stage to another, development of human and material resources basically for nation building and wellbeing of the populace. Institutions of higher education as known by their nature are avenues where creativity, innovation, critical thinking and intellectual property are explored, exchange of ideas, values and knowledge between scholars and students in order to improve the standard of living, inculcate the culture of quality and standard in all human endeavors. Most of the universities or institutions of higher education in the developing Muslim world operate below expectation in terms of quality of knowledge, facilities, curriculum, research culture, learning environment and process. The pressing issue ahead these institutions is the proper application of strategic planning and successful implementation tool, which will converge between achievement of goals, mission, vision and spiritual attainment of eternal success (al-falah) in the hereafter. Therefore, this study adopted a methodology based on systemic literature review where thematic analysis was generated to identify and examine the significant of strategic planning on education and presented some of the challenges and prospects of strategic planning faced by universities in the developing Muslim world.*

**Keywords:** Strategic Planning, Muslim World, Higher Education, Development, Challenges.

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### **1. Introduction**

The global quest for qualitative higher education has rapidly increased in the recent years more especially in the developing Muslim countries, where for several years are facing a lot of challenges and backwardness especially in planning educational contents of curriculum in science and technology. Though, recently improvements have been seen in Pakistan, Iran and Malaysia. Most universities in the Muslim countries are heavily skewed towards humanities in their curriculum; only few of them are oriented towards emphasizing science and technology (Babiker, 2007). This educational gap

created in these countries is not favorable as education in the recent decades has evolved dramatically driven by advances in science and technology, changing student needs and growing emphasis in active learning (Pavana, Chithra & Naresh (2025).

Education as the foundation of all civilization and engine room of growth and development, nation building and wellbeing has experienced a lot of creative ideas, innovations and unpredictable changes due to the contemporary global development in information and communication technology (ICT).

Therefore, going by the aforementioned changes, it has become imperative for educators and policy maker particularly in the Muslim world, to incorporate strategies of strategic planning and thinking, in order to formulate a blue print of developing especially the higher educational system and the entire education in general. The essence of strategic planning is to make the system relevant to the present dynamism of the globe and to foster quality and standard in the teaching and learning environment, perhaps promoting strategies future which is vital for the coming generation in terms of strategic choices of policy design, supporting learners' will, skills and means (Edward, 2002; OEDC, 2025).

This study intends to explore a review of some of the challenges of strategic planning in the context of converging the material gain and the eternal success (Al-falah) and the prospects facing universities in the Muslim world. Similarly, the paper also highlights the role of education, educational development and the state of universities in the Muslim countries.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **An Overview of Strategic Planning**

The "word strategy" was defined by oxford dictionary as a plan designed to achieve a particular aim. The word originated from Greek's word "strategia" meaning "generalship". This shows that, the word is earlier focused on the military battle and campaigns but later, strategy is used in public, business and educational management so as to improve performance and enhance operational efficiency (Semail, Abdul Halim & Dayang, 2025)

Strategic planning is all about giving an organization a strategic advantage to develop a best-line between its activities and the environment by formulating strategies to forecast future and manage changes and innovation. Planning strategically in education are not merely apparatus of administrative maneuver,

rather, they are transformative tools that shape trajectory of educational system (Khalilov & Avas, 2024).

According to Bryson (2004) and Khalilov (2022), strategic planning can be defined as a comprehensive effort to produced fundamental decisions and actions which enable institutions or organizations to navigate challenges seize opportunity and maintain relevance in an increasing dynamic and competitive dwelling space.

In recent years Education has experienced a lot of transformation and unpredictable changes. Therefore, it has become necessary for educators and policy makers to incorporate strategic thinking while planning for future, so as to foster normalcy in the teaching and learning environment. The important thing behind this as described by Khalilov and Avaz (2024), is enhancing educational quality and addressing both global and local challenges, perhaps promoting a strategic future is vital for an institution effectiveness through integration innovative pedagogical approaches such as project-based learning and the utmost use of digital tools (UNESCO, 2020)

Looking at the complexity of education and changing needs of both society and market, it is very important during planning to concentrate both on the ends and the means as argued by Kaufman at el (2002) that strategic planning should incorporates both the ends and the means while Virgana, Lapasau and Kasyadi (2021), emphasized that planning strategically should be more seen as a mechanism for enhancing institutional performance and achieving excellence.

### **Why Strategic Planning in Higher Education**

The dimension and responsibility of higher education in the society changes as the globe witness a persistent growth in all spheres of life since the dawn of the new millennium. Similarly, the advancement in the information age through sophisticated

information and communication technological systems have made the challenges facing our societies to multiply especially with rapid advancement of artificial intelligence which according to Lorenzo and Albert (2025), some of these challenges are really new such as ethical framework.

Unlike decades before, it has become an obligation for educational leaders in institutions of higher education to maintain strategic planning for forecasting future due to the fact that recently changes occur frequently particularly in the market and the society in large.

Also, for institutions to be current, fit able to overcome the intense competition from others, they need to change simultaneously with changing environment, technology, need of market and the society. Therefore, strategic planning is needed mainly for implementing the performance-based funding as government policy which will serve as a driver to quality assurance which is align to national objective and gaining competitive advantage (Ahmad & Yee, 2021).

Furthermore, the tool of strategic planning can be used to safeguard the teaching and learning process in the tertiary institutions because if care is not taking, universities will continue to hatch substandard graduate that cannot meet the challenges facing the society in the present and future world, thus bringing the end to human civilization and the use of intellectual property and heritage.

#### **The Role of Education in the Society**

According to Barasa (2025) education is the engine room for economic growth and human resource development which influence extend beyond the classroom, rather across all layers of the society. Education has been for long recognized by many scholars as the most important catalyst in the development of human personality.

Previously in early 90's Trivedi at el (1994) stressed that in almost all nation, education is purposely designed to play the following well-defined roles:

1. As a basic human need, individuals require education not only for structure information in the core subject of study but also as an instrument for gaining attitudes, values and skills on which they can build later.
2. As a means of meeting other basic needs, it also serves as a catalyst in creating needs that has not exist before due to expectation and aspiration of the society over the time.
3. As an activity that sustains and accelerates economic development; one major role of education is empowerment of individuals in terms of training and skill acquisition at all levels to manage capital, technology, services and administration in every sector of the economy.

However, Sukesh (2023), maintain an additional role of education historically as an agent of social change and catalyst for transformative societal progress that play a dominant role for promoting national solidarity and unity among individuals.

In nutshell the aim and purpose of higher education more especially in the university level is to pursue knowledge and to disseminate discipline in an ideal manner to which ends are to reshaping and restructuring nations and societies according to expectation of the populace. On the other hand, university is highly relevant recently, giving the central role that knowledge plays in the contemporary world.

#### **Educational Development**

The blowing wind of globalization has not only influenced higher education in the context of innovation, reforms and it role in providing academics, educational leaders and policy makers with equipped competitive knowledge, but also the growing demand for modern higher education (Yazmin at el 2007).

Global student's enrolment in universities and other institutions of higher education has shut up to 235 million in 2020 as compare to 132 millions in 2004 and 100 million in 2000 (UNESCO 2022).

Many countries have increased their budget on higher education, although the government in the later years could not continue to cater for all the financial needs of higher education couple with the growth rate of enrolment. This problem created more especially in the developing Muslim world what Yazmin et al (2007), called "unparalleled financial crisis" in the universities and other institutions of higher education.

The above-mentioned development have become well issue of concern among educators and policy makers. The challenging aspect here is the means of developing strategic planning tool to manage and maintain these unpredictable changes. The main fundamental commitment of universities is towards assuring quality in teaching and research. However, quality must not be a contradictory notion, quality in education must be socially relevant and encompasses the basic principle of ethics and training of individuals in the society.

#### **University as a Centre of Excellence**

Education is the most important element in building and transformation of society from one phase to another. University is a complex and multidimensional social environment which mainly concern on development of human mind, creation and transmission of knowledge from person to another. Perhaps responding to the changing world condition, the task and role of university in the society has also changed recently (Usman & Fatimatu, 2019).

Academically, university highly deals with training of intellectuals and professionals, similarly researchers, planners, managers, solicitors etc are all product of university or institution of higher learning. Also

exchange of ideas in the academic's society, creativity, and innovation in the context of social science, natural science and technology are all considerable contributions of university towards development of the entire society. Therefore, the essence of higher education has become more significant as a public good now and then, as research and development (R&D) personnel becomes crucial to sustainable economic, political and socio-cultural development in the national and international scene

In order to preserve standard and qualitative knowledge, universities compete among themselves in terms of intellectual faculty members, students' performance, researches, facilities etc. According to Isa (2009), the notion of a "world class university" has become not only the concern and pride of the government but also the employers, investors, alumni, students, applicants and the university themselves.

In addition, the need to excel in the expense of all other thing is the priority of many if not all the universities, but standard measures are used to qualify university into ranking position. Thus, university has remained centre of comprehensive excellence and development.

#### **State of Universities in the Muslim World**

Deteriorated state of higher institutions of education and universities is now a major problem among and within Muslim countries. An average growth has been recorded in the recent years particularly in the Arab states and the East Asia and Pacific, which shows an unprecedented rate of few new universities every year in accordance to the social needs of the society and quest for rapid social, economic and technological development (Maroof & Mamnoon, 2017).

The enrolment of students into universities in the Muslim world remain low despite the sweeping unpredicted changes in the

societal needs and market demand for valuable knowledge, global competition and transnational cross-border higher education. The total enrolment in the sub-Saharan region as of 2020 was 9%, 6.3% in the Arab state, 21% in central and Southern inclusive India. Approximately 85.3 million students enrolled in the Muslim world out of 235 million of worldwide enrolment in 2020 (UNESCO, 2022).

Another issue of concern is the reliability on the courses offer by these universities is questionable in the context of international standard and quality assurance with exception of few universities in Malaysia and Pakistan. Only few Muslim countries have a reliable accreditation system to overlook the affairs of higher education while others are proposing now. This prompted UNESCO (2003) in their report on the Arab region, which is the dominant Muslim region to say *“what seem to be lacking in the region as a whole were systems that provide sound governance to education as a whole and higher education, and the institutions that provide it in particular, that guarantee quality, ensure accountability and set measureable standards of performance for programmes, faculty and student alike”*

**Thematic constructs (Table 1)**

S/N	CHALLENGE	PROSPECTS
1	Absence of Visionary Leadership	Educational Linkage
2	Commoditization of Knowledge	Partnership
3	Inadequate Planning Experts	Reforms
4	Perfection Constraint	University-Industry Linkage
5	Inadequate Funding	Islamization of Knowledge

#### 4. Result and Discussion

Based on table 1 above, strategic planning in institutions of higher education, particularly universities in the developing Muslim countries are confronting numerous challenges in various dimensions. The challenges faced by these universities include:

Universities in the Muslim countries are lacking behind in the dimension of science, technology, strategic thinking and implementation, information and communication technology (ICT), academic innovation and prosperity etc. According to Zahlan (2006) this lack of fore-sight is due to frequent government intervention on academic affairs, appointment of scientific, intellectual and literary position has disrupt knowledge development in the Muslim world. One cannot wonder, none of the first hundred (100) ranking universities of the world in 2020 came from the Muslim countries. This is actually a disturbing problem that needs a precise solution.

#### 3. Methodology

The study was conducted using a design based on in-depth systemic literature review where relevant articles, books etc, were reviewed and thematic analysis was generated to examine the impact of strategic planning on educational development, identify the challenges faced in the developing Muslim World and proposed solutions.

#### 1. Absence of visionary Islamic leadership

Muslim countries with exception of few, lack what is meant by dynamic leadership. A sound visionary Islamic leadership, who poses both Islamic and modern knowledge, wisdom, experience and ability to combat egoistic desires into the ummatic mission. The best way of achieving this objective throughout is by practice and display of

exemplary good behavior “*Akhlaq*” which serve as important dimension of Islam that represents ethics or morality in the religion (Amilah, 2018). Similarly, ethical manners emanated from respectable *Akhlaq* will lead to a series of value essential in shaping human character through Islamic teachings such as patience, honesty, generosity and self-control for successful leadership endeavor (Mansur, Syafi’i & Amiruddin, 2023).

Apparently, such leaders are the ones needed to take the ummah out of her educational bondage of sinking into the trap’s backwardness. Unfortunately, things are in the opposite side presently as elaborated by Mernissi (2002) that, an ideal leader and the relationship between leader and followers has disappeared in the modern Muslim world, where politicians shamelessly manipulate to hide their selfish personal desires to gain power which will be later abused.

Lack of good political will and ideology, corruption and politics of rivalry is one of the major challenges that hinder not only strategic planning process but the entire educational system.

Similarly, the growing attitude of exclusiveness play an important role in tearing the Muslim world apart into insignificant segments and it usually starts from individual (biasness) to respect the ideas of others. Each one expect that his ideas, approaches, philosophy and understanding should be dominant on others in all spheres of life without recognizing the plurality of ideas that existed in the ummah over history (Usman, M. 2009).

Muslims societies now, suffer most from bad regimes and political instability that ruins their opportunity to cope and manage the changes of the modern world.

## **2. Commoditization of Knowledge**

Another challenging aspect as far as strategic planning is concern is the transformation of knowledge from being a

public good to a private good or a commodity. Going by this notion, knowledge as any other economic commodity is dictated by market and the changing needs of the society, which based on skills, such as technical and managerial skills or as Choudhury (2019) called it “managerial and financial capitalism”. The main point here is that, this evolution favoured a shift in values, perhaps Islamic values. Solidarity tends to disappear, social and spiritual values were replaced by commercial and materialistic individual values which trigger negative emotion, well-being, low self-esteem, absence of quality of life and satisfaction (Camel, 2013). Therefore, the aims of knowledge have been defeated from the ummatic perspective.

The consequences of the aforementioned issue in the context of strategic planning is that since market is the major player regarding intellectual determination, the intense perfect competitiveness of the market will lead to a situation where by dominant knowledge providers will eliminate other providers in a long-run. Similarly, some fields of study that are not relevant to the market are tending to disappear, therefore creating a large vacuum in the human civilization and intellectual heredity. Obviously for Muslim educators and planners, this is a great challenge because strategic planning tool is neither used to achieve pure materialistic gain nor to eliminate other providers of knowledge but should be focus on achieving standard and quality in exchange of knowledge and discipline in the academic arena. Strategic planning is also aimed at building sound trained human resources that are more conscious and faithful to Allah (SWT), which the coming generation of the ummah will highly relayed on.

## **3. Inadequate Planning Experts**

Effective strategic planning depends largely on trained human resources that

comprise well trained and qualified planning experts, faculty members, and educational managers within an institution. Also, competent professional and technical monitoring staffs are required as far as an effective and successful planning is concern.

Focusing on the Muslim world as a whole, one of the main challenges and problems is the inadequacy of trained human resource to support the planning strategies in the university system of most Muslim countries, with exception of few nations that have achieved minimal professional manpower requirements. Likewise lack of adequate interdisciplinary collaboration and interaction within the planning team affect in general the entire planning unit in these institutions. Teamwork is a very essential component in strategic planning and implementation process, because it helps in building trust and improves communication.

In strategic planning trained manpower is most important input, therefore for an institution to achieve its corporate objective, it must ensure that appropriate number of qualified staff that have the knowledge base, skills and expertise in facilitating the planning process are available in order to boost their competitive advantage (Siti Normi & SE, 2017).

In a nutshell frequent government intervention sometimes contribute to the inadequacy of academic and planning personels in universities and colleges across Muslim world, therefore this problem has become a bottleneck in the strategic planning process in most universities in the Muslim communities.

#### **4. Perfection Constraint**

One of the most vital and challenging aspect in the act and life of a Muslim is perfection (*itqan or ihsan*). This encompasses all fields of human endeavor, being it in polity, academic, economic, socio-cultural etc. perfection is lacking in the academic activities including strategic

planning and successful implementation process in the Muslim world, that account for the persistent backwardness of the ummah for centuries. The principle of perfection is a broad concept which entails the need to maintain sincerity, quality and standard throughout, while doing an act simultaneously perfecting it with purity (*Ikhlas*) of intension in accordance to the principle of shari'ah. The concept not only fosters harmony to one's activities but also improve the quality of human mind.

The main concern here is for the Muslim experts to use the tool of strategic planning with piety, sincerity and consciousness of Allah (SWT), in order to achieve the mission and vision of the entire ummah which inturn will assist the Muslim to regain their past intellectual glory.

In conclusion the essence of the aforementioned is to collect in together strategic tool, standard, quality, sincerity, purity and perfection in educational planning process which will give it a more Islamic face and thus more reward able.

#### **5. Inadequate Funding**

The issue of funding is a well-known problem facing higher institutions in the developing Muslim world which affect not only strategic planning and implementation process but the entire academic process, and facilities of higher educational sector. Despite the recommendation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), that countries should allocate minimum of 26 % of their annual budget to educational development, the universities and other higher institutions of learning in the Muslim world are grossly underfund which mostly affect the day to day running of these institutions. Only 3% to 20% of the annual budget is spends on education. This reality mostly leads into recurrent obstacles, deficit in implementation of programs and shortage technical and managerial competencies as elaborated by Muneer &

Ali Muhammad (2025), since education has to compete with other national sectors for its share of the public budget and more often than not, it loses out to other ministries such as health and defense.

Educational funds are among the first to be affected during the financial crises, because educators tend to be less lobbyist than representative of other sectors which undermines education standard, consistency and progressive planning process (Muneer and Ali Muhammad, 2025).

Thus, financing universities in the Muslim world is a very vital issue and a requisite to successful higher educational development including strategic planning and implementation in all member state.

### **Prospects of Strategic Planning in the Developing Muslim World**

Higher educational sector has achieved improvement in the developing Muslim countries despite the numerous challenges faced by universities in these nations; there are still potentials to contribute to the development of Muslim societies through strategic planning tool and implementation. The prospects of these universities are as follows:

#### **1. Reliable Educational Linkage among Muslim Countries**

One of the most important ways of overcoming the challenges faced by universities in the Muslim world is through educational linkage among and within Muslim countries. As known Islam is a religion that has preference to education than any other activity of human endeavor, why because right from the beginning, Islam has made knowledge to be obligatory upon every Muslim and the first thing revealed to the beloved messenger of Allah (SAW) is patterning knowledge. From this, one can understand the vitality of education and analogously the western world only become superior on Muslims as a result of the knowledge gap that exists between the west and the Muslim world.

Some Muslim states are poor while some lack intellectuals and adequate academic and strategic planning infrastructure to revive their educational sector, therefore a need for a collaborative effort have become necessary among Muslim communities. This can be possible through sound educational linkage between Muslim states which will enhance the exchange of facilities, intellectuals and students. This collaboration is compulsory now if really the Muslims are willing to return to their past glory. Allah (SWT) said: *“The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise”* (Q9:71).

Unity of the ummah depends strongly on the educational attainment of the Muslim societies, coming together and sharing common idea, thought, culture and intellectual heredity will foster unity within and among nations of Islam. The early ummah was also unified by knowledge and the linkage of educational system within the caliphate.

#### **2. Partnership**

International co-operation in education and collaborative partnership between universities and international planning/research institutes can also assist in sharpening the ability of these universities to overcome these challenges and pave a way forward for academic development and prosperity.

Partnership in terms of strategic academic planning, scholarly networks, organized conferences, maintained lengthy correspondence, established journals, arranged visits, sabbaticals and, increasingly students exchange and overseas study programmes, will all help in fostering international and intercultural understanding.

In collaboration with foreign organization/institutions and training on educational strategic planning outside the home country will directly contribute to the promotion of academic standard and quality and strengthen the strategic planning activities in higher education in the Muslim world (Al-Amin, 2005).

National and international donors through this partnership will be interesting to assist and contribute to the development of these universities which can be monitored in the sense of mutual trust and shared decision making.

### **3. Reforms**

Educational content mostly inherited from colonial system should be reformed periodically, since most of the Muslim countries are colonized in one way or the other. The need to reform the higher educational system is necessary in view of the new needs of the society, market and individuals.

The restructuring process through effective reform policy will enhance strategic planning process, research and academic development in these universities, which in turn will foster an overall improvement of the whole system, ranging from faculties, centers downward to units.

Similarly, the transformation of higher education in the Muslim world will give birth to new approaches of strategic thinking mechanism, instructional process, dissemination of knowledge and diversification of learning experience and ideas, where more emphasis will be laid on utilization of media and modern instructional materials.

Thus, as universities have become more complex facing myriad problems in the developing world includes Muslim communities, new requirement of policy and governance is very important to revitalize the academic development of these institutions of higher education.

### **4. University-Industry Co-Operation**

Intact co-operation between universities and the private firms/industries is of paramount important where both parties benefit from one another. Industrial support to universities is crucial in accelerating the academic development, joint training program both in national and international scene, strategic planning and joint research projects funding.

The interplay between higher institutions of education and industry helps in encouraging faculty members, planning team and administrators to upgrade their strategic planning procedure, formulation and implementation, academic research work and publication to meet international criteria and standard.

Exchange of ideas and experience among intellectuals in the universities and manufacturing industries promote cordiality in the context of strategic thinking, innovation, research and development (R&D).

This will support universities in the Muslim world to participate fully in contributing it quarters towards the development of the ummah, despite the changing task of these institutions based on learning and transferring new knowledge and technology in the recent years.

### **5. Islamization of Knowledge and Practice**

A proper implementation of this concept into a practical framework generally, will go side by side in promoting Islamic norms and values into the academic and administrative aspect of higher education in the Muslim world. This no doubt will positively affect the strategic planning process by motivating and boosting the morals of the entire planning team, stakeholders and administrators.

Similarly Islamizing knowledge and practice means giving academic and professional activities in the universities a more Islamic face by creating a conducive Islamic environment, which is capable of

transforming and developing of all facets of knowledge for the betterment of the ummah using Islamic worldview and (*tawheed*) epistemology.

Therefore, this paper is suggesting the proper implementation of the Islamization knowledge concept, so as to overcome the challenges faced by universities in the Muslim world regarding strategic planning process as demonstrated by Rosnani & Imron (2006) that the Islamization of knowledge movement has awakened the ummah from their comfortable slumber.

### **5. Conclusion and Recommendation Recommendation**

1. Educational Institutions especially the tertiary level in the developing Muslim nations should be led by capable and visionary leadership with full autonomy and devoid of political interference.
2. Institutions of tertiary education in the Muslim world should put more emphasis in developing and managing adequate human resource in strategic educational planning and implementation.
3. More academic linkage with relevant global ranked institutions such as academic exchange and research collaboration should be obtained and secured by stakeholders to boost the ability of faculties in the knowledge enterprise.
4. There is need for adequate and well-planned research grant from the governmental or public sector and more donors from the private sector. This help in enabling the implementation of the planning process and research content development.
5. Stakeholders in the tertiary knowledge enterprises of these countries should strive hard to provide an institution-industry linkage to utilize the products of research and innovation for the development the institutions and nations at large.

### **Conclusion**

Strategic planning is an important tool use in formulating strategies of projecting and

rehabilitating the educational system simultaneously in order to make it relevant now and future while considering the strength, weaknesses, opportunity and threat of both the internal and external environment. This planning tool was initially used only in business but due to the dramatic changes of the globe, which also affect the global educational system, strategic planning become useful and vital in planning education to overcome the challenges posed by the global transformation.

Despite the challenges facing universities in the Muslim world in relation to strategic planning and successful implementation process, there are some prospects and potentials for these universities to overcome these myriad problems. And assist them also to embrace the straight path of progress and advancement presently and future through using appropriate academic and planning culture which needs a close support of a sound leadership.

Finally, this paper is suggesting that, in order to achieve development in the educational sector and the entire economies of the Muslim world, there is a need for a sound political will and ideology that will support the overall system from the grassroots. Similarly, there is a need to implement the Islamization concept within and among Muslim countries which will give birth to a new era of revolving and regaining of the past glory of the ummah over a period of time.

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