

**Examining the Leadership Styles in Saudi Arabia: Why Saudi Women Can and Must Help Run the Schools?**

**By**

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**ABSTRACT:**

The role of women in the position of leadership in Saudi Arabia has limitedly been researched. Studies have shown that women have limitedly represented in the position of leadership in society, particularly in the executive managerial positions. From the research study done, it is apparent that only 15% of women are in the workforce, a clear evident that women are lowly represented in leadership position. Saudi women are assertively seeking for professional career and higher education. However, the patriarchy system embraced in Saudi Arabia has placed women at a greater disadvantaged position. Even though the government has considerably increased the accessibility of higher education to learners, the patriarchy mentality has continued to impede women from participating in various leadership positions. Women in leadership are highly critical in positively influencing student's learning. Female students who see women in leadership are likely to feel encouraged to work hard to rise to such positions. This study explores the opportunities and obstacles that Saudi women have to pursue managerial positions. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain how inclusion of women in educational, as well as, educational leadership would impact learning of student in Saudi Arabia, in addition to justifying why women can and must run the schools.

**Keywords:** Saudi Arabia, leadership, women

**المستخلص:**

استقصاء أساليب القيادة فى المملكة العربية السعودية: لماذا يمكن ويجب على المرأة السعودية الإسهام فى إدارة المؤسسات التعليمية؟

يعد دور المرأة فى تولي المناصب القيادية بالمملكة العربية السعودية من القضايا التي قلما تناولتها الأدبيات البحثية، بما يشير إلى أن دور المرأة فى مواضع القيادة وخاصة القيادة التنفيذية قد تم تناوله بصورة قاصرة. واعتماداً على نتائج الدراسات البحثية التي تم إجراؤها يتضح أن هناك ١٥% فقط من الإناث ينتمون إلى القوة العاملة، كما أن هناك الكثير من الأدلة الواضحة التي تشير إلى أن تمثيل المرأة فى المواضع القيادية محدود للغاية. وتسعى المرأة السعودية بصورة حثيثة للحصول على دورها المهني والالتحاق بمؤسسات التعليم العالي، إلا أن الأنظمة المتبعة بالمملكة العربية السعودية لم تضع المرأة فى المكانة المناسبة. وعلى الرغم أن الحكومة قد قامت بإجراءات من شأنها زيادة نسب الالتحاق بمؤسسات التعليم العالي للإناث، إلا أن القيادات السلطوية الموجودة ما زالت مستمرة فى حرمان المرأة من حقها فى الوصول للعديد من المواقع القيادية، حيث يعد دور المرأة فى تولي المناصب القيادية فى المؤسسات التربوية من العناصر الضرورية نظراً لتأثيره الإيجابي على تعليم وتعلم الطلاب، كما أن رؤية المرأة فى المواضع القيادية من العوامل المحفزة للطلبات على العمل الجاد من أجل للوصول إلى تلك المكانة. ومن ثم، قامت الدراسة الحالية على دراسة الفرص التي يجب استغلالها والعقبات التي تحول دون تولي المرأة السعودية للمناصب القيادية. وبصورة أكثر دقة، تسعى الدراسة الحالية إلى التأكيد على أن دمج المرأة فى إدارة وقيادة المؤسسات التربوية قد يؤثر فى تعلم الطلبة بالمملكة العربية السعودية، كما تسعى الدراسة إلى تبرير إمكانية مشاركة المرأة فى إدارة المؤسسات التربوية وحثية توليها المناصب القيادية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المملكة العربية السعودية، القيادة، المرأة.

**Introduction:**

The government of Saudi Arabia ruled the country on principles of Islam "Sharia". To seek knowledge and education is a sacred duty for both male and female in Islam. "Iqra", in Arabic mean "read" was the first word revealed in Quran. The history of female education in Saudi Arabia can be traced back to early 1990s, mainly was at home teaching women Islam and how to read Quran by the help of female teacher. The government has long recognized the importance of higher education and the development of Saudi women. Currently women's schools at all levels including elementary, secondary, high schools, college and universities are available across the country. It is worth noting here that all educational institutions in Saudi Arabia are separated between male and female, that is, schools are not coed.

Over the years female postsecondary education in Saudi Arabia has become an important and of great interest for its people mainly parents and government. Saudi women are aggressively seeking higher education and attaining professional careers. Their role in the society is increasing, and they become an active participants in the economic, social and educational life of the society. Three women were appointed as an advisors in the traditionally all male dominated parliament for the first time in 2009. All women who pursue leadership roles in the country have proven themselves that they are capable and up to the challenges, defeating what have been deeply-rooted in the male's mentality that they are incapable of doing things by themselves and they always depend on their men in their life.

Saudi government is making all efforts to make higher education more accessible for the female students. According to the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education, as of 2010 there were more than 300 colleges and universities for women in the country. More interestingly, Saudi female students represent more than 56.6% of the total number of university students and more than 20% of those benefiting from overseas scholarship program (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). Despite those numbers and despite the fact that Saudi women's role in public life is improving year after year, there is evidence that this role is below what women can and should do in serving the society. The challenges that Saudi women are facing in workplace is inherited from years of practices of traditional and male dominated society.

The situation changed dramatically after the discovery of oil in 1930's, which turned the country's economy around and created high needs for skilled workforce to fill the abundant of new jobs that emerged in all sectors including the education sector. Attracting and recruiting foreign

expatriate was a temporary solution to fill the gap of needed professions. The governmental long term plans was and still is to offer educational opportunities for Saudi's student of both sexes to pursue their higher education locally and abroad. The launch of King Abdulla Bin Abdulaziz scholarship program in 2005 was to achieve this mission and prepared highly qualified Saudi pool of talents. As of the scholastic year 2013/2014 there were over 200,000 Saudi students enrolled in higher education abroad, half of them are in American colleges and universities, and one out of five is female(Taylor & Albasri, The Impact of Saudi Arabia King Abdullah's Scholarship Program in the U.S., 2014). Upon graduation they expected to go back home and utilize the knowledge and skills they earn to perform leadership positions, and fill the shortage of leaders in the public and private sector. Gradually, replacing the foreign workforce.

### **Scope of the Research:**

With all the support that Saudi women receive from the government to pursue higher education and to develop their professional career, their leadership role in public life is still underutilized. In terms of education and capabilities, Saudi women are attaining the same level and same quality of education as men. Their presence in managerial and leadership positions are not exists or very little. There is no reason of why Saudi women are not getting the same opportunities as men in leading the education system. Those questions coupled with limited literature about the leadership role of Saudi women's derived the interest of this study. Female leadership in Saudi Arabia is hot topic that is being debated in the country at levels. This study is expected to contribute to the discussion and fill the gap in literature. Provide recommendation for policy makers and school district superintendents on how to best utilize the potential that women have in running the schools and improve student learning and educational achievements.

The appointment of Nora Bint Abdullah Al-Fayez as Deputy Education Minister in 2009 was a turning point in women's professional and social status, and changed the general perceptions about women's capabilities. Nora is a US educated former teacher. Her inclusion in the government was part of the reshuffling in parliament to free the cabinet of male domination(Alexander, 2011). Her appointment was big victory for Saudi women, and send a message that they are able to pursue leadership role at all levels, and in all aspects of life.

With all that being said, the purpose of this study is to eamine the status of women's leadership styles in Saudi Arabia with focus on educational system of grade twelve and postsecondary education. This is a

literature based study that highlight how women capabilities are utilized in education system, and what they can offer to enhance student learning and educational achievement.

### **Significance of the Research:**

The subject of leadership is emerging in Saudi public and private workplace. However, there is limited research and studies that focuses on women's role in the different sectors, education sector is no difference. This study depends on what have been written in literature about women leadership styles in Saudi Arabia and neighboring countries. This study will add to the academic knowledge and scholarly literature in Saudi Arabia. This study highlight how women capabilities are utilized in education system, what their capabilities and what they could offer to enhance the education system. This study benefit school administrators and ministry of education by raising their awareness of the significant role of women in schools settings and education system in general.

### **Research Question and Connection to Ground Tour Question:**

The main question this study aim to answer: how would the inclusion of women in education and educational leadership would impact student's learning in Saudi Arabia? the collected facts and evidence that help finding answers to this question will provide guidance and better understanding to the program essential question at Saudi level. The recommendation that this research provide will contribute to find out how shall educators' best lead in educational settings today in order to impact student learning?

### **Literature Review:**

There is an increasing attention in academic literature about the leadership roles of Saudi women that can and should pursue in the society, more specifically their roles in the education system. This study derives on what the documented information on the academic literature about women's leadership styles in Saudi Arabia and the neighboring countries. This study utilizes minimum of 15 recent resources from different types of scholarly resources, including books, journal articles, online resources, governmental and international reports, and unpublished master thesis.

The following lines an extensive literature review about women's status and leadership in Saudi education system. This part starts with brief introduction about Saudi Arabia, women's education, employment, leadership and challenges in Saudi Arabia. This paper focuses on women's leadership role in education system. The literature review examines what other researchers said about the topic which helps find answers to the main

research question “how would the inclusion of women in education and educational leadership would impact student’s learning in Saudi Arabia? To achieve the study goals, several related study areas have been investigated such as women’s education in Saudi Arabia, influence of women’s leadership role on student learning, the availability of training and coaching opportunities, and developmental programs for women, how they are utilizing these services.

Despite the increased attention that Saudi women is getting in academic research, their underrepresentation in leadership role in education and its influence on student’s learning in the literature. The findings of this study will add to the academic and scholarly knowledge in this field. This study benefits school administrators and ministry of education by raising their awareness of the significant women’s roles of in schools settings and education in general.

### **Saudi Arabia:**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is located in Western Asia, over an area of 2,149,690 square kilometers of land with no water inside the country. Total population is around 27 million (8.5 million are foreigners) mainly young with median age of 26 years, women are comprised around 45% (Saudiembassy, n.d.). Weather is harsh, dry and humid summer. The government comprised of 22 ministries and ruled the country in principles of Islam “Shahri’a. Islam born in Saudi Arabia, Mecca and Medina are the most holist cities for Muslims around the world. More than three million Muslims comes every year to these two cities for Haj. Since formal school started, Saudi society is highly valued women education, female literacy is 83% compared to 91% for male (Saudiembassy, n.d.). Many scholarly sources acknowledge the governmental efforts in encouraging women’s education and employment.

Generally, Saudi women education and employment have increased over the last two decades in public and private sectors. Additionally, Saudi women received more acceptances to be represented in Islamic religious authorities. Bano and Kalmbach (2012) found that women leadership and acceptance in Mosques and Madrased (a form of school that teach Quran and Hadith - Prophet Narration of Islam) activities significantly changed from historic practices of mainstream male dominated society (p. 9).

### **Women’s Education and Employment in Saudi Arabia:**

Saudi education in elementary, primary, secondary schools and higher education institutions is comparable to any education system around

the world. However, the government adapted the educational system in accordance with Islamic systems, traditions and customs.

Women's education in Saudi Arabia is a hot topic of all time. It suffered from traditional and conservative mentality among the society that has been seen women as good house wife. This mentality was deeply rooted in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam, and continued to exist for many years later. However, the modernization of the society and economic growth helped changed the women's status. The introduction of formal public schooling for Saudi's girls happened in 1960s, when the first primary girl school opened in Riyadh, the capital city. Before that all education was informal and usually takes place at home, with the aim was to teach Quran and Hadith (Prophet Narration of Islam) for both boys and girls (Hamdan, 2005). With the support and vision of Saudi government, educations of women become one of the national priorities. Women were empowered by the government and encouraged to pursue higher education and to seek employment in the emerging different economic sectors in the country.

The government of Saudi Arabia is committed to make higher education more accessible and available in all provinces in the country for both male and female. The economic development demands for local workforce hence the need to enhance women leadership skills. Government budget allocation for women education has surpassed that for boys after year 2000, before that was almost equal (Al Munajjed, 2010). The number of higher education institutions increased significantly in Saudi Arabia from 410 public and private universities and colleges in 1990 to over 2393 in 2011, more than 300 of them are set aside for women, and are spread around the kingdom (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013). Alhareth, Al Dighrir, and Al Alhareth (2015) reported that despite all the efforts to make higher education more accessible, there still imbalance in distribution of colleges and universities, with the concentration in eastern and western provinces. Women who live in the northern and southern provinces have less access to higher education. However, according to Global Education Digest of UNESCO in 2009 as cited in Ministry of Higher Education (2009), Saudi women enrollment in universities outnumber western women in worldwide universities.

For example, princess Nora BintAbdulrahman established in 1970 now is the largest women university in the world. It hosts more than 40,000 woman students. Despite that women make up 45.5% of the population, female enrollment in higher education outnumbered their counterpart male students. Woman students represent more than 53.35% of total number of

students in Saudi universities and more than 22% of study abroad students (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013). There have been significant changes in the society's position towards women's education. The traditional opposition of girls' education especially in higher education is increasingly changing. Unlike two decades ago, parents these days support and encourage secondary and post-secondary education of their daughters.

Woman's higher education does not reflect the real employment opportunities for them. Saudi women make up less than 15% of the national workforce (Al Munajjed, 2010). Saudi Arabia depends on foreign workforce all the time, Saudi's national comprised only less than half of the workforce. The underutilization of women's skills and capabilities is due to the deeply rooted traditional mentality of male managers, they preferred to hire foreign male workers rather than employ Saudi female who has the same qualification and can do the job efficiently. Generally, Saudi male also have to compete with foreign expatriates, however, they have better chances of getting a meaningful job in their field compared to female. More than 85% of Saudi national in the workforce were men. The 2008 unemployment rate among Saudi female was almost 5 times higher than male, women unemployment rate continued to increase and reached its highest in 2012 at 35.7%, while male unemployment reached 6.1% in the same year (Saudi Government, 2014).

Researchers reported that Saudi women participation in workforce has increased over the years, and that is mainly due to increase in number of educated women with degrees in different fields. However, the number of women graduates and quality of their education is not a reflection of their employment rates. For example, in 2008, more than three quarters of unemployed Saudi women were highly qualified, 78.3% of them have university degree, and 1,000 have doctorate degrees (Al Munajjed, 2010). The gap between women's education and participation in employment is expected to shrink in future as more women are getting employed in public and private sector. Also the government initiative "Saudization" (Zafar, 2014) that forces businesses to hire Saudi national to replace foreign workers would help more women to earn employment.

### **Women's Leadership and Challenges in Saudi Arabia:**

Historically, leadership and management positions in Saudi's workplace were dominated by male managers. Authoritative and autocratic leadership styles were mostly present at workplace. It is until last two decades, Saudi leaders with western education started introducing changes in the traditional leadership styles toward applying more democratic and transformational attitudes at work. The small participation rates of women

in workforce also reflected in smaller number of them succeed to earn management and leadership positions in public and private sectors. The underrepresentation of women in senior positions, board of directors and executive committees is common in all the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Some research indicates that GCC's women in 2014 hold less than 1% of executive committee and board positions, which is the lowest participation rates in the world (Sperling, Marcati, & Rennie, 2014). In the past decade political leaders represented by King Abdullah was very supportive for more women's leadership role in businesses and in public life. The King's initiative started by appointing more women representatives in the traditionally male dominated Shura Council (the royal advisory committee in Saudi Arabia), with at least 20% of the council representatives to be women.

However, the King's initiative and support to women did not attract or encourage managers and leaders in governmental sector to do the same thing and hire more women in managerial and top positions. Women continued to face discrimination in the hiring decisions in all sectors. Even though, the small number of those women who managed to earn senior positions are facing the same challenges that their counterparts in other parts of the world. Also they face the challenges imposed on them from the unique society's traditions and organizational culture. In a study on women in senior positions in three GCC countries (United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Oman) that share same culture with Saudi Arabia, women faced the challenges of cultural taboos, negative attitudes working women from the society and colleagues at workplace, discrimination, and lack of confidence in their capabilities as managers (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

Metcalf (2008) made the generalization that the underrepresentation of women in senior management is a common phenomenon in the Middle East region not only in Saudi Arabia. The practices against qualified women do not only keep them out of the top management circle, also it is discouraging other women in general of developing themselves. Al-Ahmadi (2011), cited by Shahine (1997) who argued that in most of the cases traditional beliefs and practices among the society regarding women leadership role will prohibit women's career development moving forward in their career path. The general traditional beliefs associated leadership abilities and skills with men, while at the same time question the abilities and effectiveness of women in pursuing leadership responsibilities.

The patriarchal culture of Arabs societies in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam which is still exist up to these days contributed to the conservative orientation of women in the society and place them in a

passive role at work and in the family. Along with the traditional culture other social institutions media and schools play a critical role in spreading negative attitudes and values towards women's leadership abilities and skills in the society, and they are unable to contribute to the societal sustainable development (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). With this mentality managers in Saudi organizations continued to have unfavorable attitudes towards women, and not willing to share work responsibilities with them.

Metcalf (2008) found that women leaders in the Middle East lack of methods and tools of empowerment at work place, which is reflected in their inability to affect the decision making process. They have less access to knowledge and information compared to their counterpart male leaders. Also they are not getting the same rewards and encouragement as the male leaders, their participation in goal settings for their departments is dominated by their superior male managers.

### **Women's Leadership Role in Saudi Arabia Education System:**

There is not enough information regarding the role of Saudi women in education system. However, the assumption in this section is that Saudi women face the same situation found in other economic sectors. Low employment rate and low or absence from being represented in top management positions.

Ministry of Education oversees the education in elementary, primary, and secondary schools for both boys and girls in Saudi Arabia. Each province has a general director of education and four deputy directors (one female) that supervise the girls' schools within the province (Mathis, 2010). Due to the segregation of education in Saudi Arabia education system, female principals and teachers are responsible for girl's school education. School principals usually selected based on strict criteria of having relevant university education and poses leadership skills. Education experiences and maturity are important determinant factors for hiring high school principals. According to Mathis (2010), in field study on eastern provinces mention that candidates for principal position should have at least eight years of work experiences in teaching, and the average age of principals participating in the study was 45 years old. According to these hiring requirements, fresh university graduate or young professionals have low chances to pursue principal leadership positions in high schools.

Established in 1975, the Ministry of Higher education is responsible to provide higher education for both male and female students in the kingdom. Women's higher education in Saudi Arabia consists of a network of colleges and universities that spread all over the country. As of 2012, there were over half million female students enrolled in these higher

education institutions, and that was doubled the number in 1999 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013). The mission of higher education in Saudi Arabia is to create number of educated female to be future leaders and fill the shortages of national leaders in private and public sectors.

In order to achieve this mission, most universities in the Kingdom teach leadership courses for women. Due to the harsh policy enforcing gender segregation, universities and colleges offer educational programs and courses for women only. The only women's educational setting does not help women prepare them to the real work place environment that include mixed gender. Even though in universities where only women are responsible for classroom teaching, Saudi teachers qualification and skills were not trusted by their educational institutions to pursue teaching jobs. For example, Princes Nora University is the largest women university in the kingdom does not offer leadership positions for Saudi female teachers. In 2012, the university fired 400 female teachers after one year of teaching and replaced them by foreign teachers of same qualification and skills (Al Arabiya, 2012).

There is limited information and statistics found in literature regarding Saudi women leadership positions in higher education. Ministry of higher education reported that female faculty members tripled in 2012 to 19,660 compared to 6,442 in 2000. However, the report does not specify whether or not the increase came from hiring more Saudi national women or by attracting foreign women. To investigate what these numbers mean for Saudi women. The writer visits several ministries and universities websites to check for representation of Saudi women in high ranking positions or as faculty members. The finding was not surprising; majority – over ninety percent- of high management positions and faculty members are male.

In King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), according to the faculty list in their website, there are 134 faculty members in all research divisions, 8 of them are female and only 2 women are Saudi nationals (KAUST, n.d). These bring the ratio of Saudi women to total number of faculty as low as 1.5% KAUST established in 2009 as public research university in science and technology. The university is known for its western style in education and research techniques. However, the university does not apply gender equity in the hiring process. The expectation is that new and modern educational centers are to pay more attention to gender balance among their faculty members, administration and management teams.

In Prince Sultan University (PSU), the management team consists of seven members; only one of them is Saudi female setting alone among 18 members in the board of trustees committee, also the same female is setting in the university council. There are no female representatives in the executive committee (PSU, n.d). The last example is Fahd Bin Sultan University (FBSU), according to their website, there are only 2 female (one Saudi and one non-Saudi national) represented in the 18-member university administration committee, and there is no female representation in board of trustees (FBSU, n.d). The situation in all universities is the same in regards to the underrepresentation of female professional in top management positions. The selections of these examples were subject to the limited information in other universities. None of the colleges disclose information about the faculty members or management teams.

It is obvious through the examples above that Saudi women are excluded from leadership and top management positions in higher education sector. This conclusion supports the main assumption of this section that women in educational sector are facing the same situation as in other economic sectors. There is no surprise that Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ranked third in bottom between all countries in terms of number of women in professional and managerial positions. Even it was in the top third globally in secondary education for women (GE Hewart, 2014). It is worth noting here that low representation of women in leadership and top management positions is global issue. For example women only occupy 23% of college and university president posts in United States, and out of the 14,000 school district superintendents, roughly 15% of the posts are held by women (Gupton, 2009). In Australia, women occupy 30% of leadership positions in universities, in New Zealand women represent only 16.9% of professors and associate professors, while in England, only about 13% of women being promoted to full professors (Odhiambo, 2011). Underrepresentation of women in top management positions in universities and colleges is no difference than other parts of the world. However, in Saudi Arabia the percentage is too low based on the reviewed universities profiles.

### **Women's Leadership Role and Impact on Student Learning:**

Women's leadership role impact on student learning is very limited and even absent in Saudi Arabia. Generally, appointing women in top management positions improve their confidence and capabilities. When women set in decision making circle, they will be able to provide the other side of opinions. With college and universities constitute a turning point in students' life, the existence of female teachers and leaders could play a role

model for female students; empower and encourage them to pursue higher education. Many studies link women leadership in educational institution with; inspirations of female students, prepare them with the skills they need to pursue similar roles in future, coaching, encouragement and transferring of skills are among many benefits that women leaders can share with female students(Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003).

In a study on 14 different women's colleges and universities in five continents around the world, Renn (2011) found that in some countries where schools are coed, female students tend to choose single-sex colleges because they believed they would have greater access to student leadership than they would at coeducational institutions. Access to more extracurricular activities is another factor that helps female students developing the leadership skills. In the same study, Renn (2011), found evidence that female students are encouraged by women teachers and leaders to participate in student leadership activities on and off-campus such as; student government, honor boards, entrepreneurial activities, sports, internships off campus, academic societies, and international travel" (p. 186).

### **Women's Leadership Programs and Government Initiatives:**

Al-Ahmadi (2011), in a survey study on 160 Saudi women leaders found out that the amount and quality of leadership training programs and services that are available to women is inadequate to meet the demands and challenges of their role as leaders. Some universities and colleges are teaching leadership courses aiming to improve women's leadership skills and empower them. Alexander (2011) evaluated one of the main leadership programs that offered to Saudi female in Prince Mohammad Bin Fahad University. The results supports that leadership courses may have influence women's attitudes towards their leadership competences. Also the result indicates that there is significance difference in attitudes towards women talking leadership courses.

The Saudi government took several initiatives that promote women's employment in private and public sector. Al Munajjed (2010) spotted several governmental initiatives that aimed at enhancing women's role in the economy. All those initiatives are very recent within the last 10 years. Started with changes in labor code regulation in 2004, the Saudi Council of Ministers established special women's sections within the government, employment and training initiatives. The same regulation has been revised in 2006 to include more benefits for working women in regard to maternity and medical care leave, nursery provisions, vacation time, and pensions(Al Munajjed, 2010). The Saudization policy which requires companies to

employ certain number of Saudi national in their workforce based on their size. There is no doubt that this policy opened more opportunities for Saudi women to enter the labour market.

In 2011, the government announced new initiative to promote women's employment; it's called "female employment in retail sectors". This initiative required all cosmetic shops and lingerie shops that sell women products to replace all their male staff with women. Stores were given one year grass period to make the changes, in 2014 the initiative extended to include other shops and other retail sectors that sell women products(Saudi Government, 2014).

There are several other Saudi initiatives that aim to increase job opportunities for women to help them advance their careers up in the management hierarchy. Some of the national initiatives include; Five-Year Development Plan (2005–2009) emphasized the need for more employment, Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud announced plans in 2007 to allocate one-third of government jobs to Saudi women, Human Resource Development Fund (HADAF) aims to increase job opportunities for Saudi women(Al Munajjed, 2010). Other grassroots and non-governmental organizations were and still effective in promoting women employment and empower them to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams. Some of these organizations provide training and capacity buildings for women to improve their employability, while others finance projects and provide business advices for women who want to start their own business.

### **King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Scholarship Program:**

The government of Saudi Arabia has been encouraging and sponsoring students to study abroad since early days of the establishment of the kingdom. It is started with sending students to study Islamic subjects in other Arab neighboring countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. The initiative grew year after year as more Saudi students demanded opportunities to study abroad. In 2005, King Abdullah created new scholarship program which is named after his name "King Abdullah Scholarship Program" (KASP). This program started as five year project, and was extended more than one time since then, the last time was extended until 2020. KASP allows qualified Saudi student to study abroad in one of the universities and colleges that are listed and pre-approved by the Ministry of Higher Education. Every year students are sending to more than 21 countries around the world. Majority of students are attending their studies degree programs in United States (30%), United Kingdom (15%), Canada (11%), Australia (8%), and Egypt (6%). All students are expected to graduate and return home at the end of their studies. Every year Saudi

government spends around 9 billion Saudi Riyal (equal to US\$2.4 billion) on the program (Ministry of Higher Education (Arabic) , 2013).

Number of students enrolled in KASP has increased by 20-fold between 2006 and 2012, from 9000 to more than 185,000 KASP recipients respectively. KASP provides Saudi female with good opportunity to pursue their education abroad. Despite the traditional Saudi cultural restrictions of women traveling alone (they have to be accompany by first relative male adult), in 2014, there were more than 21% of all students enrolled in the program in all countries are female (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013). However, number of female students exceed one third of total KASP's recipients in the United States (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). Female students' engagement in graduate courses is a much higher proportion of the total. For example, in 2012, female students were comprised around 44% of master students, 35% of PHD students, 28% fellowship programs, and only around 15% in undergraduate programs (Abouammoh, Smith, & Duwais, 2014).

The program provides significant benefits for students especially female through engaging with academic and community life in western countries. There is no doubt that Saudi female students feel empowered, they develop number of professional competencies and strengthen their work and social habits. In studying the benefits of Saudi students studying in North America through KASP; Abouammoh, Smith, and Duwais (2014) mention several benefits of the program, more specifically, students developed "discipline; punctuality; teamwork; commitment to work and product quality; perseverance; and the importance of tolerance for the views of others" (p. 48).

From the perspective of the researcher as beneficiary from the program, studying abroad for Saudi female students help them not only to attain higher education, but improve their leadership and communication skills and prepare them to pursue high management positions back home. However, there is no specific statistics or studies that examine the impact of the KASP on women employment in Saudi Arabia. The only piece of information that is available is women participation in labor forces has increased due to increase number of graduated women.

## **Research Summary and Conclusions:**

### **Review of the Proposed Problem:**

Women in Saudi Arabia have extremely been underrepresented in various leadership positions. For instance, women only make up 15% of the entire national labor force. This is surprising considering the fact that

women have the necessary education required for them to acquire a place in the top managerial positions. “In light of what is known about how children learn and educational policy and practice, how would the inclusion of women in education and educational leadership impact student’s learning in Saudi Arabia? Why Saudi women can and must run the schools? This research examines several areas that are related to the topic that leads to practical recommendations of how shall educators’ best lead in educational settings today in order to impact student learning?”

### **Importance of the Topic:**

There are myriad studies done on the how to enhance the leadership skills of women to make them prospective candidates for leadership position. The number of women in the executive managerial positions is relatively low and their representation in the national labor force only 15%, which is far below the global requirements. This study, therefore, highlights how women capabilities are utilized in education system, what their capabilities and what they could offer to enhance the education system. In addition, the study explores how inclusion of women in educational and leadership positions impacts student’s learning in Saudi Arabia. This study benefits school administrators and ministry of education by raising their awareness of the significant role of women in schools settings and education system in general.

### **Summary of the Literature Review:**

The present study focuses on the leadership roles of women in Saudi Arabia’s educational system, as well as, why women can and must run schools. Specifically, the study explores the opportunities and impediment that women in Saudi Arabia are experiencing in their pursuit for managerial purpose. From the study, it is apparent that the female postsecondary education in Saudi Arabia has become increasingly pertinent for the people of Saudi Arabia, majorly the government and parents. The representation of women in the executive positions of leadership is relatively minimal. In that respect, women are doing everything possible to pursue their higher education with the sole objective of attaining professional career growth. This has been triggered by the fact that their roles, particularly with regard to social, economic, and educational development is increasingly taking shape.

The study has shown that women who are aggressively pursuing leadership roles within the country are proving beyond any reasonable doubt that they are not only capable, but also up to the challenges that come with it. This spirit is indeed defeating the colonial thinking that has been taking place in society that females are incapable of doing things by

themselves and what they require almost depend entirely on men for their survival. Besides women struggle to defeat the colonial thinking that they are incapable, the government is also currently playing a critical role in empowering women to rise to the executive positions of leadership by making higher education highly accessible to the female students. This is evidenced by the fact that more than three hundred colleges and universities for women were available in the country if the information from the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education is anything to go by.

Further, the number of female Saudi students represents a total of 56.6% of the entire number of the University students with an estimation of 20% of the students benefiting from overseas scholarship programs. Even though the representation of Saudi women in the public life is increasingly improving, the fact remain that the role they currently play in society is slightly below what women should do to better serve society. The study establishes the challenges that Saudi women are facing, in terms of rising to the executive position of leadership.

The fact that the Saudi workforce comprise of only half of the Saudi nationals based on this study implies that there is a need to promote women education to fill the various positions of leadership rather than outsourcing skills. The higher education of women in Saudi is rarely translated into job opportunities evident by the fact that only 15% of the Saudi women are making up the national workforce. It is outrageous that the Saudi government regularly outsources foreign workers, yet the number of women in the national workforce is extremely low. This is a clear indication of underutilization of the women's skills because traditional mentality of the male managers that a womanis unable to perform effectively. The managers, therefore, prefer outsourcing foreign male workers instead of employing the Saudi females.

The topic of women's education has brought forth a hot debate among different people and groups in the society. While others are for empowering women to acquire the position of leadership, others are still entrenched in traditional thinking that women cannot perform anything substantial without the help of their male counterparts. From the study, it is perceptible that women are facing serious challenges as far as getting a position in the job market is concerned. The fact that some managers still outsource for foreign employees, yet skilled women without jobs are available is an indication of a male dominated society.

## **Discussion and Applications:**

### **Application:**

The importance of women inclusion within the educational and leadership positions in any country cannot be ignored. Studies have shown that women inclusion in various positions of leadership is likely to positively influence learners, particularly the female learners. However, despite having the education and the qualification required, women have been extremely underrepresented in the top management positions, something that have been contributed by both the institutional and cultural factors. Therefore, the fact that women inclusion in leadership positions positively influences learners implies that the government must rise above the cultural and institutional barriers to ensure that women are adequately represented in top leadership positions in the country. This will positively influence the female students to work hard and rise to the stated leadership positions leading to increased number of women in various leadership positions in Saudi Arabia.

### **Insight:**

From the study done, educators might gain insight into the obstacles that have contributed to the low representation of women in education and leadership positions in Saudi Arabia despite them having education and the required qualification. In addition, educators have gained insight into the role played by the inclusion of women in leadership as far as influencing student's is concerned. It is now apparent that institutional and cultural factors are great obstacles leading to the underrepresentation of women in various leadership positions in Saudi Arabia.

### **Future Studies:**

Women and leadership, and why Saudi women can and must help run the schools is an area of study that is likely to attract a considerable number of researchers owing to the limited research done so far in the area. There is a need to carry out further research to ascertain the reasons behind the reduced level of women in the positions of leadership. It is prudent to determine why the Saudi managers still embrace patriarchal system and why they opt for outsourcing foreign employees as opposed to making use of the available skills from women. From the research study done, it is clear that women are underrepresented in labor force. This is evidenced by the fact that only 15% of women are in the labor force. Therefore, it is imperative to ascertain the pertinent reasons behind this low representation of women in the labor force. Other studies have found that the traditional culture that gave men authority over their female counterpart could be

integral in this enormous disparity. However, this may not be the only factor contributing to low representation of women in the position of leadership hence the need for further research in this area.

Current study has indicated clear evidences concerning the obstacles and opportunities that Saudi women have experienced in their struggle to rise to the executive leadership positions. Plethora of literatures has been reviewed to ascertain the pertinent reasons behind these impediments. It is evident that the traditional mentality held by a number of managers has contributed in the low number of women in the workforce. This implies that there is a need for measures and strategies to reverse this trend. This research is therefore, significant to the policy makers as it can be used as a basis for developing policies to enhance the representation of women in the leadership position.

### **Summary of the Literature Review:**

The primary role of this study was to explore the opportunities and obstacles that Saudi women have to pursue managerial positions. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain how inclusion of women in educational, as well as, educational leadership would impact learning of student in Saudi Arabia, in addition to justifying why women can and must run the schools. To provide answers to the primary research questions, this study conducted an extensive review of literatures in Saudi Arabia, the neighboring countries, as well as, worldwide.

Historically, management and other leadership positions have always been dominated by the male counterpart. This is a clear indication that Saudi Arabia have for long embraced patriarchy system where male dominates the females. Autocratic leadership styles have been witnessed in a number of workplaces in Saudi Arabia. Women irrespective of their education and skills are considered inferior and unable to perform optimally as their male counterparts. The percentage of female in the national workforce is only 15%, yet the country have been outsourcing for foreign workers. The extremely small participation rate of women in the labor force has also been reflected in the workforce where only a few are represented in the management and leadership positions.

The underrepresentation of women in board of directors, senior positions, and executive committees is not only prevalence in Saudi Arabia, but the entire Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Certain researches have shown that in 2014, women hold less than 1% of the board positions and executive committees, considered the lowest participation rate globally. The underrepresentation of women in the position of leadership has majorly been contributed by the old thinking that women are

unable and that must just be guided by the male counterpart. This implies that for women to be effectively integrated into the position of leadership there is a need for national campaign awareness that women too have skills, and therefore what a man can do a woman can do better. The Saudi managers should stop outsourcing for foreign workers, and instead make use of the skilled women available in Saudi Arabia. This would be integral in nurturing the talent of women, in addition to promoting gender parity in the labor force.

The patriarchal culture that characterized the Arab societies in the Arabian Peninsula, which is still evident, played a pivotal role in the promotion of the conservative orientation of women in society and placing them in passive role in the family and at work. The schooling system and the media have also been blamed for propagating negative values and attitude against women's skills and abilities in society that they play limited roles in the development of sustainable development. This mentality have prompted the Saudi managers to continue holding negative attitude towards women, and therefore, unwilling to include them in work responsibilities.

It is apparent that both women and the government of Saudi Arabia are doing everything possible to promote women in leadership positions. The women are aggressively seeking for higher education to acquire the relevant skills required to rise to the top level positions of leadership. On the other hand, the government is struggling to make higher education highly accessible for female students. This has been evidenced by the fact that by 2010, there were over three hundred universities and colleges for women in the country (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). In addition, the female students represent over 56.6% of the entire student's number in the University while 20% of women are benefiting from the overseas scholarship program. Making higher education accessible to the Saudi women together with conducting educational awareness to dispel the myth that women are unable in society would help to enhance the representation of women in leadership positions.

There is scanty of information regarding the role played by women Saudi educational system. This could be attributed to the fact that the Saudi society is male dominated, and therefore, women plays very minimal roles. Education in Saudi Arabia is highly segregated along gender lines. For instance, the girl's schools are led by the female principals and teachers. The selection of principals is based on stringent criteria, including possession of excellent leadership skills, as well as, having apposite university education. Therefore, despite limited information about the role played by women in the Saudi educational system, the fact that they have

been represented as principals clearly shows that they are playing a significant role in the implementation of the educational curriculum.

The role of women leadership on student's learning in Saudi Arabia is not only limited, but sometimes absent in the country. The role of women leadership in student's learning cannot be ignored. Studies have shown that the availability of women in top leadership positions encourage other female students to work hard to rise to the top leadership positions. A considerable number of studies have associated women leadership in the educational institutions with preparation of female students to future leadership roles, motivation of the female students, coaching, transfer of skills, as well as, encouragement. In this respect, it is clear that women in leadership positions acts as a motivational agent to the female students making them feel encouraged to work extremely hard to rise to the leadership positions in society.

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