Addressing Gender Equity Constraints in Saudi Arabia Through the Power of Adult & Continuing Education's Cognitive Production Based on Socio - Political View

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معالجة تحديات العدالة بين الجنسين عبر تأثير الإنتاج المعرفي لتعليم الكبار والتعليم المستمر من منظور سياسي- اجتماعي

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Abstract

Although significantly more initiatives have been created to address gender issues in Saudi Arabia through Saudi vision 2030, some adult education researchers argue that there are some constraints that hinder progress in gender equity. The aim of this paper is to explore: 1) the most common gender equity constraints due to the lack of gender research on women's issues in Saudi Arabia, Saudi legal systems as well as Saudi social and customary norms; 2) the role of adult & continuing education in addressing gender equity constraints along with some recommendations.

Keywords: Adult & Continuing Education, Social constraints, Gender Equity, Socio-Political Recommendation.

الملخص

في الأعوام القليلة الماضية، شهدت المملكة العربية السعودية تطورات اقتصادية واجتماعية وثقافية انطلاقا من رؤية المملكة العربية السعودية ٢٠٣٠. والتي انعكست

إيجاباً على معالجة العديد من قضايا المرأة ورفع مستوى تمكينها ومشاركتها السياسة والاقتصادية والاجتماعية بناء على قدراتها ومعرفتها، إلا أن هناك العديد الدراسات أشارت إلى وجود عدد من التحديات التي تواجه المرأة السعودية في طريقها. هدفت هذه الدارسة إلى الكشف عن: ١) التحديات العامة في سبيل تحقيق العدالة بين الجنسين المتمثلة في الأبعاد الاجتماعية والثقافية بالإضافة إلى ٢) دوربرامج تعليم الكبار والتعليم المستمر في معالجة تلك التحديات وتقديم التوصيات لها من منظور سياسي- اجتماعي ثقافي.

الكلمات المفتاحية:تعليم الكبار والتعليم المستمر، التحديات الاجتماعية، العدالة بين الجنسين، توصيات سياسية واجتماعية .

Introduction

If adult & continuing education research is important in general, it may be even more important in a country that is undergoing social change (Sakr, 2008). In recent years, a number of efforts have moved Saudi Arabia toward increased involvement with the world, an increased role of women as researchers or participants in different productions of adult education such as research, self-development programs. Cognitive productions of adult education play a vital role in each one of these areas, whether it is a cultural movements and social Awareness, specific education to help women navigate their changing role in society, or helping the workforce to adjust to unfamiliar work.

Sakr (2008) conducted an analysis of the six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain, indicated that educational issues and research are the most complex in Saudi Arabia. Although the Saudi government has implemented a number of educational reforms, the reform process has been slower than in other GCC countries. This tendency may change over time, and the Saudi government's recent efforts to address

some gender issues raised by adult education researchers are promising. Despite the increase in adult education studies and investigators in Saudi society (Alajlan and Peterson, 2013; Alhamidi, 1976; Alsenbl, 1989), pro-women research which matches women's everyday needs in their lives has not succeeded to progress in the adult education field approved by Saudi universities.

Adult education researchers and their works, like in other societies in the modern world, face different types of challenges constraints. The consequences of these constraints have affected many sectors in the Saudi society, particularly education and research, higher educational institutions as a whole and their members.

Political, Religious and Social Norms at Islamic World Level

Saudi Society

Education (directed by educational and religious policies)

Universities & Research centers

Adult educators & their productions

Power Dynamic within Saudi Arabian Higher Education and Faculty Members
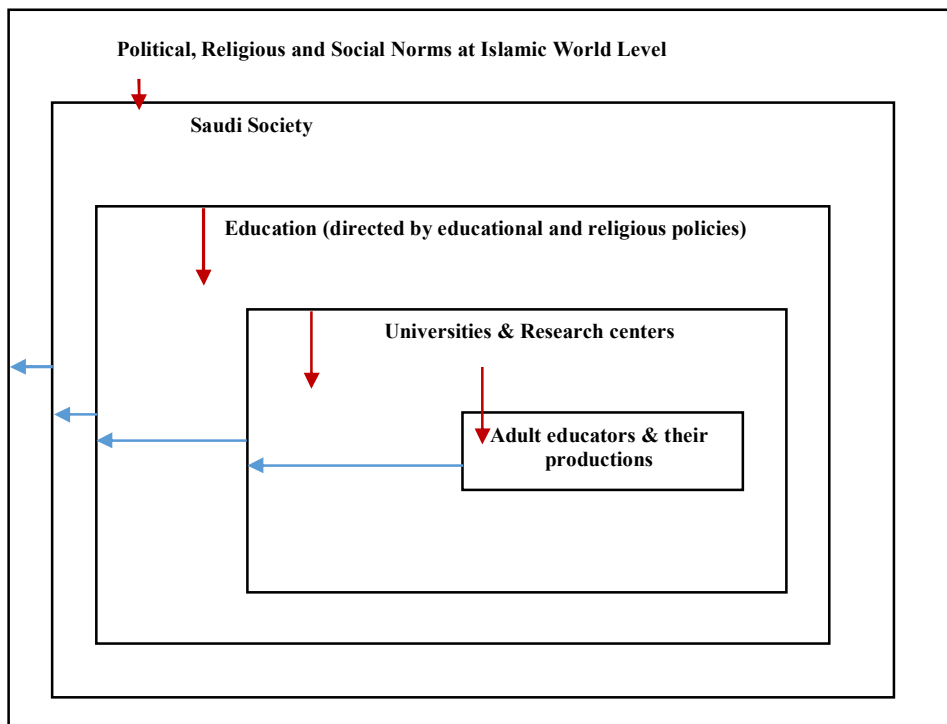
Figure 1 shows how adult educators are surrounded by three levels: the society's norms, education system, and educational and research organizations' policies at Islamic level. In Saudi Arabia, society is driven by political, religious, and social norms, which impact the education system and its policies focusing on Islamic system and gender segregation. In turn, the education system has influenced the educational institutions and research centers, which is monitored by religious and educational policies. Ultimately, this system has influenced faculty members as adult educators and their projects.

Many progressive researchers aware of these factors understand when it is appropriate and inappropriate to introduce new ideas and actions and how social changes happen. In addition, they are supposed to be committed to social changes within the framework affected by social and religious norms. Therefore, once adult education researchers decide to conduct a study in gender equality in the Saudi society, they will have to find ways to introduce their ideas and produce socially significant findings in a respectful way. They will also need to understand the context in which the arguments are made.

As adult education and research play important roles in raising women voice, progressive researchers who actively work in Saudi Arabia have had to confront and overcome certain social barriers to gender equality. The purpose of this article is to explore gender issues in Saudi context and the role of adult education that hinder addressing such issues along with some recommendations. This paper will answer the following questions: What are the obstacles that hinder gender equality in the Saudi context? What is the background behind these obstacles existed in the Saudi context? What are the possible paths or procedures to overcoming these obstacles through adult education research and practices to move toward gender equality in the Saudi context?

The Pace of Progress on Gender Equality in Saudi Arabia

The last decade has witnessed a considerable shift in the area of gender equity in Saudi context because of a number of factors. According to the Ministry of Education (2015), there has been a sharp increase in the total number of public and private universities from 8 to 53 since 2005. This expansion has also driven an increase in the number of academic researchers from a total of 25,000 in 2005 to a total of 60,000. Another strong statistic is found in the increase in graduate programs at major Saudi universities, which is now up to 45,000 male and female students. The number of students traveling to study abroad at Western universities has increased drastically.

Regardless of impediments impacting women's education and research, the officials of Saudi Arabia have vividly demonstrated their formal intent to proceed with this delicate social issue in general and the gender issue in particular. During the last decade, the government has made it possible for the number of higher education institutions to increase and has made the institutions accessible to women (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014). As the main visionary of proper gender roles in Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz (King of Saudi Arabia from 2005 to 2015) was the main initiator of this new directive. King Abdullah also provided women with study-abroad benefits similar to men, and this has been a big opportunity for Saudi women to study apart from a society that considers men above all women. More importantly, King Abdullah accomplished this trend in a smooth manner and without social protests, which indicates that today's society is flexible enough to accept women's value in education as long as there is strong support from the central government.

Saudi female professors such as Hayat Sindi, Samiri Ibrahim Islam, Howaida Obaid al-Qethamy, Ghada al-Mutairi, and Soraya Al Turki have become pioneers of high achievement in scientific research and academics (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014). Nora Al-Fayez, a United States educated

teacher, was appointed as the first deputy education minister for the Department of Female Student Affairs in 2009.

Since 2005, the Saudi government has sought progress towards modernization through science diplomacy and empowerment via transfers of modern education equality theory. In 2009, against the odds of political and social debate, the King Abdullah Science Co-education University was established with subjects that were globally accredited and scholarships that permitted male and female student attendance (Elyas & Picard, 2013; Islam, 2014). The rise in female university enrollment will also be aided by King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) which is the first mixed-gender university campus in Saudi Arabia. Saudi authorities hope the mixed-gender center will help modernize the kingdom's deeply conservative society. Further, Princess Norah bint Abdul Rahman University has been established as the world's largest higher education center for women (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014).

The King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud Project for General Education Development was funded with $2.4 billion to invest in training, teaching, curriculum development, educational supervision, and the integration of advanced technology to the Saudi educational processes (Islam, 2014). Also, the 2004 King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Scholarship program significantly increased the number of opportunities for Saudi's female students to study abroad and return to work in Saudi universities in different fields.

The system of education has also faced drastic changes regarding women's role in it. More women get secondary and tertiary education in comparison with men (Hausmann, Tyson&Zahidi, 2012). Thus, The King Abdullah University of Science and Technology is considered an experiment that assumes permitting unveiled dresses on campus and co-education.

The employment area has also undergone positive changes. Traditionally, girls of Saudi Arabia had been taught that raising children and taking care of the household was their only social role (Balaa, 2005). In recent years, employment rates among women have increased drastically. Health care, finance, and banking have become the areas where workplaces for both genders have developed. Nevertheless, the percentage of employed women in Saudi Arabia is lower than in other Islamic states (BI-ME Staff, 2010). Saudi women tend to become health care practitioners, teachers, lawyers, or business leaders. However, Saudi Labor Ministry remains conservative and does not support employment of women (Sallam & Hunter 2013).

Adult& Continuing Education in Saudi Arabia

The concept of adult & continuing education differs from one community to another, depending on each community's pedagogical philosophies, as well as the cultural, economic, and social elements and beliefs that shape communities. Jane Vella acknowledged that her view to adult education "transcend cultural differences" (Vella, 1994:xv). As an example, when the Republic of Turkey was established by Ataturk in 1923, it was established as a secular state although Islam is the dominant religion. Scientific methods of inquiry are popular and there are many secular universities which publish research journals (Edis, 2009). On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's education system is derived from Islamic philosophy and the first secular university was not established until 1957.

Islamic philosophy emphasizes that individuals are equals and should continue the quest for knowledge throughout life. For example, there are many Quran verses which describe the gender equality in general: " فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِنْكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ ۖ بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ ۖ فَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَأُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُوذُوا فِي سَبِيلِي وَقَاتَلُوا وَقُتِلُوا لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ثَوَابًا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الثَّوَابِ" ‎(I shall not lose sight of the labor of any of you who labors in My way, be it man or woman; each of

you is equal to the other (The Qur'an Al-Imran, 3:195)". Such verses provide a forceful stimulus for the Islamic community to strive for education and lifelong learning.

Spiritual equality, responsibility and accountability for both men and women is a well-developed theme in the Quran. Spiritual equality between men and women in the sight of Allah is not limited to purely spiritual, religious issues, but is the basis for equality in all temporal aspects of human endeavor. Other than in the field of education, people in Saudi Arabia do not have a clear concept of research on gender equality, so the majority of them consider it as western feminist view.

Elyas & Picard (2013) indicated that the main change that has taken place in the lives of Saudi women is the neoliberalism paradigm in education, which made females more assertive, self-confident, and capable of defending their point of view. Islam (2014) accredited with the 2013 appointment of 30 women to the Shura council as the biggest, most significant change along with the right to vote that was given to Saudi women in 2015 supported by the current King Salman.

This has causes a shift in social focus towards the investigation of adult education research and practices that have an emphasis on social and cultural issues. Although there is notable growth in terms of university-level research and social change, that growth has been mitigated by influential cultural forces such as religious criteria based on restrict interpretation of Quranic verses that generates constraints such as problematic social and political norms that limit studies.

The Saudi government has admitted when Saudi Arabia's deputy crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, interviewed by the Economist which is an English-language weekly newspaper owned by the Economist Group and edited in offices based in London. said [the permission of women's family members] has its own social criteria and religious criteria. Some of them are

things we can change, and some things even if we want to change we cannot do that" (2015).

Accordingly, researchers and their works, like in other societies in the modern world, face different types of challenges obstacles, particularly in gender equality. The following section will discuss the obstacles in gender equality in Saudi Arabia.

Obstacles in Gender Equality in Saudi Arabia

Despite the fact that a lot of initiatives have been put in place to improve adult education in Saudi Arabia, it is critical to focus on the obstacles that deter progress.Saudi Arabia is very different from other countries in the Arabian Peninsula due to the focus on religious nationalism and all implications as the basis of their existence. On the contrary, religious nationalism is not the key principle of Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and United Arab of Emirates (Al-Rasheed, 2012). Therefore, this fact allows them to discuss gender issues and the place of women in society more easily and explicitly.

What does it mean to consider religious nationalism as a key life principle? It means that piety of the state is evaluated on the basis of the treatment of women (Al-Rasheed, 2012). Typically, limiting women is the major aspect, according to which the state evaluates its piety. More limitations put on women increases the reputation of the state from a religious nationalist point of view. Nevertheless, the inconstancy of the state shows changes in its attitude toward women over 50 years, illustrating a fluctuation, while religious nationalism is stable and dogmatic in its nature. Since the political area is one of the core aspects of the state, the policies and principles of the state are dependent on the changes occurring in politics. However, they may be connected with the basic principles of religious nationalism. The following sections introduce a discussion of three major groups of obstacles to gender equality in Saudi Arabia: The Lack of Gender Research on Women's Issues, Saudi legal system and Saudi Social customary.

The Lack of Gender Research on Women's Issues in Saudi Arabia

In adult education, feminist research is imperative for following up all developments in the adult education movement to explore the challenges women are facing and to keep up reform momentum in this field. If feminist research has problems or difficulties, it may affect the three benefits of research at any educational institution: linkage with society, quantitative and qualitative development, and abundant economy (Alreys, 1992). Because there is a lack of feminist research on gender issues in Saudi Arabia, this leads to continued obstacles. According to Mobaraki and Söderfeldt (2010), the social norms prohibit females from taking part in physical activities in public; in fact, girls' schools do not offer sports education. The government of Saudi Arabia, including the Saudi Sports Authority (Women's section), should eliminate the existing barriers to sports in federations, businesses, schools, and team sports. Several post-conflict nations are organized in a patriarchal manner. As a result, women end up facing a lot of gender inequality in every aspect of life, especially in property rights and decision-making (Jayachandran, 2014).

Gender inequity also characterizes access to all sorts of resources and public services. There is a notion that sport, which is a public resource, is solely designed for boys and men, and hence, not convenient for women (Huggins & Randell, 2007). Wilcke (2012) indicated that sport is fairly gendered as evidenced from Saudi Arabia. Feminist research in regard to gender issues in sport is lacking, and women are not represented or involved in the sports sector on any level.

Research by Vidyasagar and Rea (2004) showed that while the place of women in Islamic countries and Islam has been discussed in publications, the social status of women in Saudi Arabia has been scarcely mentioned. In fact, such publications are almost non-existed. Analyzing the experience of

28 women doctors working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the researchers identified some of the problems that women face in achieving their career and professional success due to the role of gender in allocating responsibilities.

Obstacles Due to Saudi Legal Systems

Regarding the World legal systems, Saudi Arabia is different from other countries because of two reasons. First, Saudi Arabia is overwhelmingly Islamic and has always been ruled under the Shari'a, or Islamic law. The sheer existence of an additional legal system in Saudi Arabia, besides the Islamic Shari'a, is regarded as an offense against the Islamic character or modernity of the country and its judicial system (Maisel, 2014). Secondly, official laws in Saudi Arabia are ordained from the top (i.e. from the King and his legislation). Nevertheless, other regulations established from the bottom (i.e. from customs, traditions, and practices of the local community). While the official laws which is issued from above needs the support of a powerful centralized institution, the regulations which arises from customs and norms requires broad public acceptance. Customary norms (Urf) commands this kind of general support and respect.

Laws and legal systems in Saudi Arabia represent a Muslim Law monosystem, which has a Muslim autonomous legal system, based on religion and the principles of Qur'an (Juriglobe, n.d.). In numerous countries promoting and practicing Muslim tradition, this system has particular limitations in terms of the laws associated with personal status, which is broadly defined. Two main gender issues in this system are related to Women's Mobilization and Child Marriage.

Prohibitions Related to Women's Mobilization

Women are prohibited to drive in Saudi Arabia, except for rural areas, where women drive "because their families' survival depends on it," and because the mutaween cannot effectively control this issue in remote areas, as a Saudi native contends.

Nevertheless, woman driving in remote areas was repressed in 2010. Though Saudi Arabia did not introduce a written ban on women driving, a locally issued license is required to be used by citizens while in the country. Nevertheless, women are not provided with such licenses, thus creating obstacles for legal women driving. Moreover, woman driving has been announced haram (i.e. forbidden) by the majority of Saudi authorities and scholars. AL-Rasheed (2012)provided five reasons which are considered typical for prohibiting women driving:

1. Driving a car requires uncovering the face.
2. Driving a car would cause women to leave their homes more frequently.
3. Driving a car may cause interaction between women and non-mahram males (e.g., traffic accidents).
4. Women driving may cause overcrowding in the streets and depriving young men of an opportunity to drive.
5. Driving may cause serious issues connected with traditional values, like gender segregation.

November 6, 1990, demonstrations is the biggest publically known action taken by the Saudi women. Forty-seven well-educated women were demonstrating on the street of Riyadh against the ban on women driving. Women are not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, the ban is still on irrespective of many later attempts by other younger activists such asManal Alsharif, Wageha Alhueder, and recently Lujain Alhathlol who was jailed for two months in 2015 for attempting to cross the borders between Saudi Arabia and UAE using her car.

The use of public transport is not recommended to Saudi women, as well as hiring private drivers and taking taxi due to the consequences leading to khalwa – illegal connection to a non-mahram man. Furthermore, women are allowed to use bus and train services to a particular extent. For example, buses allowing the transportation of women require them to use a

separate entrance and take their sit in a special section reserved for women in the back of the bus. Nevertheless, women are totally prohibited to use buses in Riyadh and Jeddah due to a more extensive coverage promoted by bus companies.

On the other hand, critics oppose to the ban on driving because: (1) the Qur'an does not support this issue; (2) it violates the gender segregation traditions by forcing women to use taxis with male drivers; (3) it represents an excessive financial burden for families due to the money (30% of a woman's income) spent on taxis; (4) it deprives women of opportunities for education and employment, which require commuting. Moreover, sexual harassment by male drivers has become a frequent case, whereas the public transport system is considered dangerous and insecure.

Child Marriage

Is Islamthe religion promoting pedophilia? Though human right activists tend to stop the uncivilized tradition of child marriagein Saudi Arabia, Muslim men would not reject to marry girls younger 18. (UNICEF, 2015)

The effort taken toward increasing the legal age of marriage to 15 failed because the most authoritative and senior figure in the country –Sheikh Abdulaziz Al al-Sheikh (the Grand Mufti) – proclaimed that Islam approves marriage with underage girls. Therefore, the Grand Mufti declared that the marriage with the girls younger 15 is permissible, though the justice ministry of Saudi Arabia and human rights activists rigorously tried to achieve the increase in the legal age of girls.

Grand Mufti Abdulaziz claimed that Muslim men are allowed to marry girls younger 15. The statements of this person are authoritative, because Abdulaziz is president of the Standing Committee for Scientific Research and Issuing Fatwas and president of the Supreme Council of Ulema, what makes him influential in promoting Islamic teaching in Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, Muslim clerics achieved success in protecting the legal rights of men, allowing them to marry minor girls. Recently, considerable efforts have been made by reformists toward the prevention and prohibition of abominable tradition of child marriage approved by the majority of Islamic scholars. Nevertheless, multiple Muslim scholars strongly opposed the attempts to forbid child marriage.

For instance, the case of Dr. Salih bin Fawzan, 2011, clearly demonstrates the tendency of Muslim men to marry underage girls. Dr. Salih bin Fawzan – a member of the superiorreligious council in Saudi Arabia and a cleric – put forward a fatwa, declaring that no minimal age was established for marriage, as well as indicating that girls are ready to get married since their birth and infancy.

The majority of Muslim scholars, who strongly support child marriage, contend that Sharia (i.e. Islamic law) has not determined an age threshold to marry girls.

Nevertheless, the most challenging issue for individuals seeking to transform Islam and to stop child marriage approved by the majority of Islam scholars is the marriage of Muhammad – the role model of Islam – with a six-year-old Aisha and its "consummation" when the girl was nine.

Many Muslims believe that denouncing child marriage implies denouncing Muhammad. Therefore, this issue seems to be unchanged in Saudi Arabia, as well as across the Muslim world due to the religious beliefs. Bottom-line: girls under 18 keep suffering.

Obstacles Due to Saudi Social / Customary Norms

In Saudi Arabia, no official laws or regulations were issued that refer exclusively to the Bedouin tribes. In civil and criminal cases that are dealt with in Shariʿa courts, the principles of Islamic law are applied, usually in accordance with the norms of the Hanbali school. However, in rural areas, tribal law still

holds a strong position among the settled, semi-settled, and nomadic populations.

Customary law earns recognition from individuals who see the advantages of behaving according to the expectations of other members of the group to which they belong. Therefore, it does not need a powerful force to maintain law and order, because it is based on mutual understanding and acceptance.

Tribal customs in the patriarchal culture of Saudi Arabia, and the manner in which the Sunni scholars Ulama translate Islam define the rights of Saudi women, yet such translations are inconsistent. The chief of religious police, Sheikh Ahman Qassim Al-Ghamdi, argued that Shariahdoes not prohibit gender mixing (Sallam & Hunter, 2013). However, Abdul Rahman Al-Barrak, who is an exceptional cleric Sheikh, came up with a fatwa that put emphasis on the need to kill advocates of IKtilat (to mix freely) (Zoepf, 2010). The sternness of the regulations also differs significantly in various regions. For example, Jeddah can be regarded as a relatively peaceful area, while Riyadh and regions surrounding it have harsher restrictions regarding the rights of women(Al-Huwaider, 2009).

Cross-gender Communication Problems in Workplace

In Saudi Arabia, universities are also influenced by tribal culture. According to the Saudi Arabia Education Policy, Article 155, males and females should be separated (with some exceptions) at all levels of education. The colleges for girls and boys are administratively separated into female and male administrations, where male faculty normally have more influence than their female counterparts over financial and organizational decision-making. In the same way, female students can be taught by male teaching faculty only through closed circuit television (CCTV) (Alfassi, 2009) whereas female undergraduate students are under the strict supervision of their guardians and male caretakers. In spite of the women's representation in university faculties, they experience persistent

feelings of neglect and suppression in decision-making in educational development programs (MHE, 2010). The departmental meetings between female and male for program planning or other administrative and management purposes are restricted, and communication happens through video conferencing, CCTV, emails or phones. While all the faculty members have a right to share opinions and vote, they are all required to sign the agenda items before the department head, a male, makes the final decision.

The Saudi culture places some social obstacles on females that limit research, especially because of cross-gender communication problems. Even though research is many cultures allow interaction between female and male researchers and participants, Saudi culture does not allow cross-gender interaction outside the immediate family. In other words, Islamic law does not allow a research study that involves a male researcher and female participants. In addition, studies that propose the interaction of females with males outside their families are not allowed in Saudi Arabia. This can only be described as gender segregation because men and women cannot work together unless they are close relatives. In fact, men are not allowed to look at women in the face, but women can do so. This restriction can be seen a barrier to research as cross-gender communication is merely inadequate in this culture. This makes it very difficult for researchers to carry out research that requires cross-gender communication. The consequences can be seen in how interviews can be carried out, how the interaction of participants is forbidden where females and males need to be involved in the study, and how male researchers are not allowed to interact with female participants directly in their research investigation.

Male Guardianship of Women

According to tribal customs, women are supposed to have a brother, father or husband as their male guardian. Each

guardian has his own rights and duties in regard to the women he protects. It is an honor for men guardians to protect women in the Saudi society (Mackey, 2002). As a matter of fact, this type of protection is not a form of law but a social convention and is strictly followed by all the members of the society. The stay of American troops in the region after 9/11 led to a decrease of restrictions faced by women (Almunjjed 2009).

The tribal lifestyle dictates the guardianship scenario more than Islam because the Qur'an promotes the mandatory educational practices for all followers, irrespective of their gender.This indicates that women ought to be educated in order to obtain spiritual and moral perfection. In addition, the Qur'an clearly give evidence that women have rights and privileges to propriety, work and own property (Al Munajjed, 1997).

According to the personal status law of Saudi, women who are not married are the ward of their fathers, married women are a ward of their husbands, and widowed women are the ward of their sons. The society is male dominated with a high social coherence, and it is very common to see a woman being forced to get married to a relative. In fact, in the Saudi Arabian communities, around 50% of the marriages are consanguineous (Mobaraki & Söderfeldt, 2010). The mortality rate of the infants is high in spite of an effective vaccination program and reliable health care facilities, and genetic diseases are likely a contributing factor. In 2006, the infant mortality rate stood at 18.5 per 1000 (Mobaraki & Söderfeldt, 2010). An estimated 1.5 million people in Saudi Arabia have or are carriers of hereditary blood diseases, and this creates a heavy medical cost burden to the nation and families. For example, the prevalence rate of beta-thalassemia train in a single region was found to be 3.4%. The personal status law affects the health care of women at different levels. There is also a MOH law that does not allow a woman to be admitted to a government hospital if a male guardian does not accompany her. In addition, particularly

in rural regions, a male relative can forbid a woman from being treated by a male obstetrician or gynecologist irrespective of whether the case is an emergency or not. It is also astonishing to see that an adult woman is not allowed to sign consent for an invasive medical procedure herself, even in emergency cases.

The Role of Adult Education in Addressing Gender Issues in Saudi Arabia

In every society, education plays a key role in solving many challenges. The main challenge for many social communities in Saudi Arabia is the issue of equal opportunities and rights. For a long time, the topic of gender equality has been connecting different stakeholders who are jointly striving to ensure the rights of women are equal and visible in practice. Also, the role of Education is to prepare women for their expected roles as wives and mothers and to able some to work in teaching and health services in order to serve the female population. Regardless of the fact that women education started twenty years later than boys under the umbrella of the religious establishment in 1960, education has changed the lives of Saudi women in unprecedented forces. In the last ten years, the liberal movement has grown from demanding basic rights for women such as education and health services to more (holistic approach) to call for Human rights for all include Children and minorities.

Nowadays, there are strong, untraditional voices among Saudi women. Helped by the strong presence of social media, especially after 2010, young Saudi women are starting to express their dissatisfaction with the traditional expectations of women. These include issues such as the veil/face covering, segregation and working in jobs that are offered to males only. Social media is playing a key role in speeding their demand, especially through Facebook, Instagram, Kick, flex, and snapshot (Albakr, 2015).

Raising Public Awareness of Gender Issue in Saudi Arabia

Raising the awareness is very important in promoting gender equality, particularly when employing strategies that improve well-being among individuals affected, increase visibility, and involve the general public. Al fassi (2012) believes that this action was a milestone in women's movement in Saudi that encouraged other women to speak out. Social media is another platform that is utilized by young Saudi population to avert the strict prohibition by the government of any form of organized movement. Statistics show that Saudi youth are growing enormously as users of YouTube, Twitter and other social media platforms (Global Web Index, 2013) (Arab social media influence summit, 2015). Through the internet, people, including women, find a place to voice their opinions through various sites and outlets. Examples of these sites are "Saudi Woman" blog run by Eman Al nafjan, "Tanawor" (Enlightenment), "Tahreer" (to be free), Saudi Women writer groups, "Sunday Women Group" .and many other groups.

In theory, a lot need to be carried out in order to minimize the gendered view of roles. Is it logical to view education/nursing jobs as feminine jobs as more masculine? There is a need to challenge this notion, and this first thing to achieve this could be more funding for "feminine" sectors.The Saudi government should fund centers for Women's Studies or centers for Gender Studies, to promote women's equality, in universities across the country. The centers for gender studies or women's studies centers will be significant sites for evaluating and distribution of the thought of internationally and nationally recognized scholars of feminism and of how gender matters ought to be understood from an Islamic perspective, particularly in Saudi Islamic universities. The above centers will promote gender equality and feminist advocacy.

Adult education gives learners self-confidence and helps in empowering women to decide on their own on what is good for them. Also, adult education increases their skills and may

help them find (better) jobs, hence increasing their financial independence. It gives them an opportunity to educate their children in a better way as well as assist them at school, hence breaking the education poverty circle that is usually passed from one generation to the next.

Workplace learning is capable of playing a major role in changing attitudes toward women who return to work after maternity leave, which would create more opportunities for career progression by extension. This is particularly significant in male-dominated sectors where women are normally underrepresented in high-ranking positions. Business enterprises should oblige to reducing the pay gap by offering equal opportunities for working mothers, and education is a key factor in this.

To support women to become independent, it is important to implement education measures which will lead to social impact such as: to formulate and license training programs on domestic violence and gender-based violence for the employed in education sector, organizing training for teachers on gender equality at the level of primary and pre-primary education, developing inter-subject curriculum on gender equality in primary schools, and organizing teacher training for gender equality teaching within non-compulsory subjects healthy lifestyles and civic education, which indicates that the gender equality program ought to be integrated into the entire education system.

Expanding Gender Research Frameworks in Saudi Educational institutions

Researchers can plan their work based on different Schools of Sunni jurisprudence which are Hanafi, Maliki, Shafiai, and Hanbali (Hussain, 2007). Although Saudi universities have taught explored four Sunni schools of jurisprudence in their programs, those universities' focus is on the Hanbali school; consequently, most research framework has

concentrated on its traditional interpretation (Report on International Religious Freedom, 2011). There are some practical and philosophical differences between these schools of thought. In regard to Saudi Arabia, researchers never identify themselves with a specific school of thought, merely naming themselves as Sunnis or Muslims; however, populations in some regions mainly- whether unintentional or intentional – comply with the views of one school while valuing others. Progressive researchers have successfully work to expand adult education research and practices by introducing concepts such as Islamic feminism this encourage the religious authorities to expand their definitions of acceptance.

Minimizing the gender pay gap is a great step to take towards gender equality; however, education can do great by changing perceptions of people of viewing some jobs as masculine or feminine. Downplaying these stereotypes will improve diversity in gendered fields, such as engineering and education, which will benefit both men and women. Individual activists organize meetings and lectures to promote their causes but are closely monitored and well controlled by the government and conservatives .Due to the Islamic nature of Saudi, all groups are advocating the re-writing and the new understanding of Islamic teaching regarding women legal and social rights.

Incorporating Alternative Methods of Data Collection in Research

There are methods that can help researchers to overcome these constraints. These methods involve allowing researchers to overcome cross-gender communications barriers. The recommendations include implementing technologies that allow female participants to be involved in research studies in a way in which men cannot see them visually and conducting interviews with alternative platforms such as by telephone.

Technology provides the traditional Saudi community with ways to solve some of its social equity problems. Modern

technology comes to the rescue to preserve the rule that men and women cannot operate in the same workplace (Al-Bakr, 1997; Al-Fassi, 2000, 2009). Segregation, a practice less strictly followed before modernization, was gradually institutionalized until it became a new reality. Thus, the main challenges occupying conservatives in Saudi Arabia have been how to maintain and regulate the veil and how to prevent women from working alongside men (Alfassi, 2009).

To preserve women's privacy and separation from men without preventing them from studying or working, the country adopted closed-Circuit television (CCTV) and modern communication facilities. According to North and Tripp (2009), "while the cleric's interpretation of the Qur'an prohibits face to face communication between opposite genders, nothing in the Qur'an bans video conferencing" (p. 66). Video conference has allowed women to observe male faculty members and instructors on television without reciprocal observation, and internal telephone made communication possible between the two sides.

The process of securing segregation is an essential element in understanding and assessing the development of Saudi women's social and economic life in the past three decades (North & Tripp, 2009). Video conference's main outcome has been its social acceptability. In as much as the women needed a male guardian's permission to study and work outside the home, conditions for doing so had to be made acceptable to him. Today, the complex system of the video conference that includes a sound system, wired and wireless types of communication, and the latest mobile phones, has helped to empower researchers or participants who either welcome or critique segregation and has allowed the relative degree of participation in meetings, conferences, and lectures. This system paved the way for more researchers and participants to enter into the public sphere, albeit in a segregated way.

Other realistic design methods include hiring female researchers to interview female participants. Methods that researchers use to overcome cross-gender communication issues also include research are using more women as researchers, or participants, that using different methods to collect data without breaking the social norms such as a survey. For example, hiring a female assistant to collect data from female participants or the guardians helps female researchers to collect data from male participants. Supporting strategies can modify technologies that women can see men but men cannot see women. Options include conducting interviews by phone or using survey methods because this approach is acceptable culturally.

The Conclusion

In Saudi Arabia, adult education research has influenced by several factors especially when these research is women-oriented. Social structures have an impact on the methodologies and means used by adult researchers to produce socially significant changes. The Saudi government has admitted once Saudi Arabia's deputy crown prince said "This has its own social criteria and religious criteria. Some of them are things we can change, and some things even if we want to change we cannot do that" as a response to the role of women in Saudi Arabia. However, it has rolled out initiatives to broaden the political and social role of women in an educational sector. Hopefully, these initiatives will lessen these cultural and social factors and expand the scope of adult education research and practices generally.

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