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## **The Esnad Initiative as a Means of Feminization of Teaching in Riyadh Public Schools: An Exploratory Study of Teachers' Initial Experience**

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### **Abstract:**

Female teachers have significantly contributed to the primary teaching profession for a long time , although this is not the case for Saudi elementary education. The current study investigated Saudi female teachers' opinions regarding the feminization of the teaching profession in Saudi public elementary education schools. Since the experience is new in Saudi Arabia , this study aimed to pinpoint the obstacles encountered by the first Saudi female teachers who taught boys for the first time. A questionnaire was administered to female Saudi teachers in the schools which the Saudi Ministry of Education (MoE's) selected to start the feminization of teaching in Riyadh city. A descriptive analysis of the mean and standard deviation was utilized. Additionally, correlation analysis was used to understand the relationship between teachers' majors and their opinions. The findings revealed that the referral of teaching boys to female teachers negatively affected teachers' performance in the classroom. The study results revealed several factors that have contributed to teachers' negative opinions , namely lack of school support , inadequate school facilities , and students' lack of discipline. Recommendations for improving the educational experience for both teachers and students were provided as well as recommendations for educational administrators.

**Keywords:** Feminization of teaching, Saudi Vision 2030, elementary schools , female Saudi teacher , classroom management , academic achievement , stereotype , Esnad.

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## مبادرة "إسناد" كوسيلة لتأنيث التدريس في مدارس الرياض الحكومية: دراسة استكشافية للتجربة الأولية للمعلمات

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### المستخلص:

استقصت الدراسة الحالية رأي المعلمات السعوديات فيما يتعلق بتأنيث مهنة التدريس في مدارس التعليم الابتدائي الحكومية. كما هدفت الدراسة إلى تحديد المعوقات التي واجهتها المعلمات السعوديات في تدريس البنين في المدارس الحكومية عند تطبيق نظام (إسناد) لأول مرة في المدارس الحكومية. وقد تم تصميم استبانة للمعلمات السعوديات في المدارس التي تم تطبيق النظام بها في المدارس الابتدائية بمدينة الرياض. واستخدام التحليل الوصفي للمتوسطات والانحرافات المعيارية؛ بالإضافة إلى استخدام تحليل الارتباط لفهم العلاقة بين تخصصات المعلمين وآرائهم.

وقد كشفت النتائج أن إسناد تعليم البنين إلى المعلمات أثر سلباً على أدائهن في الفصل. حيث أظهرت النتائج عدداً من المعوقات منها: الدعم المتدني للمعلمات من الإدارات بمستوياتها.

والبنية التحتية غير المجهزة في بعض المدارس ، وقلة الانضباط الصففي. وتوصي الدراسة بتحسين التجربة التعليمية لكل من المعلمين والطلاب بالإضافة إلى توصيات لصناع القرار في وزارة التعليم.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تأنيث التدريس ، رؤية السعودية ٢٠٣٠ ، المدارس الابتدائية ، المعلمة السعودية ، إدارة الصف ، التحصيل الدراسي ، الصورة النمطية ، إسناد.

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## Introduction:

Throughout the past 40 years to the present day , the increasing number of highly qualified female academics and the growing presence of women in the workforce have reshaped professional organizations in many countries across the globe. In the current context , the teaching profession has not been an exception. Women have been dominating the teaching profession for a long time , depending on the culture and their social beliefs concerning the role of women in their society (Serban , 2015). Women's dominance in the teaching profession generated a concept known as the "feminization of the teaching profession". In education literature , the term "feminization of education" usually refers to two concepts (Ross , 2021). The first focuses on the increased presence of women in the teaching profession and the gradual policy process through which professions initially led by men , in quantitative terms , start to become dominated by women (Reskin & Ross , 1990). The second concept , however , views teaching as "feminine" , indicating specific qualities of femininity , specifically those related to motherhood (Ross , 2021; Restler , 2019).

In Saudi Arabia , the feminization of teaching in primary schools is currently one of the most discussed topics among Saudi educational professionals. The term is referred to as Esnad (Alotabi , 2010) , indicating a referral of primary-level teaching to Saudi female teachers. The term Esnad was first introduced in 2010 , referencing the feminization of teaching in private schools in Saudi Arabia. During that time , the Saudi Ministry of Education (MoE) allowed private schools to have the choice to feminize teaching in primary schools with the necessity that boys and girls should be separated in classes (Fargali & Abdeen , 2017). It should be noted that the Saudi MoE officially implemented the Esnad Initiative in 2019 as a response to boys' underachievement that was merely interpreted in terms of the absence of female teachers in elementary education. One of the claims the Esnad Initiative promotes is that , unlike male teachers ,

female teachers have certain qualities of caring , patience , and kindness as the mothers have , which , arguably , enable them to improve elementary students' achievement. The Esnad Initiative has been implemented in general education schools since 2019. The Esnad Initiative is not new in the education system of Saudi Arabia. The feminization of teaching was already in effect in some private schools from an early age (Alotaibi, 2010). During the year 2021 , the Saudi MoE raised the previous percentage by assigning the teaching of boys in early childhood (elementary grades) to more female teachers by 37.4% in order to achieve the goals of the Saudi Vision 2030 (Ministry of Education , 2021) . It aims to contribute to one of the educational objectives of Saudi Vision 2030 , which is to improve Saudi students' STEM competencies and their participation in international competitions (Saudi Vision 2030 , 2017). To achieve these goals , the feminization of education , as MoE claims , is considered one of the initiatives that would help improve boy students' achievements in reading , math , and science (Al-Anzi , 2020). The initiative bases its argument on studies that studied the influence of teachers' gender on students' achievements , especially in early childhood and elementary stage (e.g. , Bonomo , 2010; Fargali & Abdeen , 2017).

The historical and social reasons that called for the separation of education in Saudi Arabia

Girls' education in the Kingdom through the Presidency of Girls' Education and its legislative basis

The Saudi Royal decree was issued on Thursday , 10/22/1959 declaring that schools open for girls , stating that the girls' education system should follow specific criteria under the supervision of an official body in the name of the General Presidency for Girls' Education. Among these criteria is the selection of female teachers with good faith and sincerity. These schools were supervised and mentored by His Eminence the Mufti (General Presidency for Girls' Education 1992 , p. 23). Fifteen primary

schools were established in addition to the Institute for Female Teachers (General Presidency for Girls' Education 1992, pp. 24–25). The official education policy document issued in 1970 CE regarding girls' education stated, "It prohibits mixing between boys and girls in all stages of education except in nurseries and kindergartens" (Article 155, Al-Haqil, 1996). The results of Al-Sarhani's study (2003) showed that one of the most attractive fields of work for Saudi women is education because of the non-mixing rule in this sector, as it is the basis for attracting Saudi women to work in the education sector.

## Statement of the problem

Despite the growing role of female teachers in Saudi Arabian public schools and the past ten years, only one explorative research was conducted to report on the results of this decision on the male students' achievements. Even in western research, there is a lack of research conducted that investigates the impact of referring teaching to females in early grades on students' performance in various subjects. In Saudi Arabia, no research has been carried out to investigate the impact of the Saudi MoE's decision on students' performance, teachers' experience, or their needs. The significance of the current study emerges from its contribution to investigating the impact of the referring. To the researchers' best knowledge, only one explorative study was conducted on the issue, along with one study that investigated the parents' opinions in this regard (Fargali & Abdeen, 2017; Alenazi, 2020). The current research seeks to identify some of the issues and challenges Saudi female teachers encountered while teaching boys for the first time.

The research aims to investigate Saudi female teachers' opinions regarding the MoE's decision to feminize the teaching profession in primary education. The research also highlights the obstacles Saudi female teachers encounter when teaching boys for the first time.

## Research questions:

In specific , the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the opinions of female elementary teachers regarding the experience of teaching boys for the first time?
2. What are the obstacles female teachers encounter during the experience of teaching boys for the first time?
3. Are there significant differences between female elementary teachers' opinions towards the experience of teaching boys for the first based on their specialization and/ or their education levels?

## Literature Review

To reach valid results on whether female teachers could lead to better performance on the part of students at the elementary stage , it is essential to discuss related issues in co-education. Much research about co-education investigated relevant issues related to male and female students from different aspects, including the cognitive and biological differences between the two genders. For example, in educational psychology research, experts have attributed the behavioral differences between boys and girls to psychological issues and the physical changes that occur during puberty. Both genders are likely to engage in physically risky behaviors (Sax, 2005). However, males, who are unable to understand and control their emotions, are more likely to engage in aggressive actions, which can lead to destructive behavior, whereas females' early hormones make them more prone to use inductive thinking skills such as reasoning (Krommer, 2006). Additionally, with regard to the learning styles and motivations of both genders. Many studies have investigated the difference in learning approaches between both genders. For example, some studies, such as the one conducted by Weight (2010), found that male students use deductive reasoning while female students use inductive reasoning. Other studies,

however, did not find significant differences in the approach they used for learning. The study also found that boys use their visual-spatial tendencies to participate in activities that emphasize movement objects and mechanics, whereas girls can choose roles that satisfy their verbal-emotive preferences Weight (2010).

The experience of co-education in the Arab and Gulf area involves some cultural and religious issues and challenges (Yosef, 2021; Al-Anazi, 2020; Abbas & Mahdi, 2005; Nasser, 2016; Sowedan et al., 2016; Sarhan, 2005). One of the most recent studies on this issue in Arab countries was that of Yosef (2021). Yosef's study measured the influence of feminizing the teaching profession in Palestine on students' academic performances. Abbas and Mahdi (2005) also discussed the same issue, indicating that the uniqueness of Saudi social circumstances and cultural elements, such as gender desegregation, have amplified communication and comprehension issues between the two genders.

Rowe and Withers (2002) further contended that co-education has some requirements and challenges related to academic achievement, curriculum development, teaching methods, classroom management, learning styles, and school readiness. For instance, some of the issues raised regarding the curriculum are the need sometimes to explain and demonstrate religious concepts and requirements for boys and girls that might be sensitive in mixed-gender classes. Some of these issues can cause embarrassment for both teachers and students. Furthermore, the current curriculum might contain gender bias, stereotypical behavior, and gender expectations which teachers should be aware of. As a result, it is critical to reconsider some curriculum concepts and topics, particularly in social and religious studies disciplines reflecting on students' growth, needs, and the goals of the current stage as well as training teachers as to what questions could be raised from these topics and how they can deal with these situations and answer these questions (Rowe & Withers, 2002).

Furthermore , many studies were conducted to measure the dynamics and outcomes of classrooms led by either female or male teachers. The discussion regarding which gender constitutes a better teacher for young learners has been investigated in several studies. Puhani (2018), for instance , carried out secondary-data longitudinal research , which covers the span between the years 2007/2008 and 2011/2012 , across the German state of Hesse , with the possibility of covering more than 1 ,100 elementary schools , including over 11 ,900 teachers. Given this statistical restriction , the author limits his analysis sample by exclusively considering the children's performance with respect to the three main elementary subjects: German , Mathematics , and General Studies. In relation to pedagogical concerns regarding whether the feminization of elementary education can negatively affect boys students' development , Puhani found that there is no significant difference , statistically , between female and male students' performances in relation to the teacher's gender.

It has been argued that female teachers are more likely than male teachers to provide learning experiences that improve students' learning outcomes (Carrington & McPhee , 2008; Antecol et al. , 2012; Burusic et al. , 2012; Puhani , 2018; Rahayani , 2017). Such an argument explains the Saudi MoE's decision concerning the referral of teaching young boys to Saudi female teachers in public schools as a response to the academic achievement gap found between girls and boys in math and science subjects. For example , the results of the PISA 2019 test report in reading , science , and mathematics revealed that Saudi Arabia scored among the lowest of the seventy-eight participating countries (OECD , 2019). Furthermore , The TIMSS results of 2019 revealed that Saudi students were among the lowest performers (Mullis et al. , 2020). Though there was no scientific confirmation that female teachers were considered the best to teach elementary boys learners , the MoE sustained its decision , implementing the ESND program to reduce the academic performance gap found between boys and girls. Investigating the results of this decision is one of the main objectives of the current research.



The feminization of teaching in Saudi Arabia is a new educational policy aimed at improving Saudi students' achievement and increasing Saudi participation in international competitions. However, implementing the new program is expected to yield some challenges for the Saudi MoE and those who are involved as stakeholders. These challenges include overcoming the teachers' and administration's resistance to the new decision (Yaro & Saleh, 2018), gender behavioral expectations and learning styles (Komar, 2010), curriculum revision, and teaching methods (McKnight, 2015). Fargali and Abdeen (2017) conducted a study that examined the influence of the feminization of teaching in private schools in the Saudi city of Medina on students' achievements in Math and Arabic language subjects. The study compared the performance of two groups of students; those who were taught by male teachers and those who were taught by female teachers. The results revealed significant differences between the results of grade 1-3 students in both subjects in favor of female teachers. Fargali and Abdeen (2017) is the only experimental study found to investigate the impact of the feminization of teaching in Saudi Arabia on young students' achievements. Hence, the current research is considered among the first studies on this issue that explored the topic from the teachers' perspective. Alenazi (2020) investigated parents' opinions regarding the feminization of teaching in Riyadh public schools. The results of the study showed that the parents supported the Saudi MoE's decision regarding referring the teaching of boys to female teachers. They believed that female teachers have abilities and personality traits such as care, empathy, and patience when dealing with young boys (Alenazi, 2020). The two studies have contributed to the topic; however, research remains scarce in the area of feminization of teaching in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, so far, no research has been conducted that reflects on the experience of female Saudi teachers teaching boys for the first time. The current research seeks to fill the research gap and aims to identify some of the challenges Saudi female teachers face while teaching young boys for the first time.

## Methodology

### Research Methods

The main objective of this research is to explore the opinions of female teachers within the Saudi Esnad Initiative and how it affected their teaching practices and experiences. The researchers have employed a quantitative research approach to reach a broader and more inclusive understanding of the topic since quantitative methods are science-based, unbiased, focused, and fast (Sukamolson, 2007). To this end, this research utilized questionnaires designed by the researchers to investigate Saudi public school teachers' opinions regarding their experiences in teaching boys for the first time (Alleme et al., 2005; Swidan et al., 2016).

In line with the objectives, the sampling method needed to focus on targeting the corresponding participants of the Esnad Initiative; thereby, 52 Saudi elementary schools in which the Esnad Initiative was implemented were purposefully selected for the study. For this purpose, the researchers contacted the Saudi MoE to reach a wider targeted population in Riyadh City, the capital of Saudi Arabia. Initially, data was scheduled to be collected once, but the need for more sufficient responses prompted the researchers to send the questionnaire again within two months. It must be pointed out that these questionnaires were sent via online links to the MoE, which, in turn, distributed them to the targeted female teachers. As a result, the current research-based results are based on a total of 208 responses.

The original questionnaire, submitted for validation by experts in the educational field, contained 22 items. After the validation process, the items were finally reduced to 21. This self-administered questionnaire was designed to collect both primary and secondary data from the respective participants. These 21 items functioned as an assessment method for the first experiment, assigning female teachers to boys' education in public primary schools. The positive response options ranged from 1 ("Never") to 3 ("Always"), where 2 stands for "Sometimes". In contrast, these response options were reversed

for the negative items - 1; 2; 3; 4; 6; 7; 8;10, and 11, respectively. In addition, the questionnaire includes three professional characteristics variables (Educational level, Specialization/Major, and Years of experience).

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was conducted to ensure the reliability of domains in the research. The Cronbach's alpha for this questionnaire was 0.861; consequently, the researchers used a highly reliable ( $>.7$ ) and valid tool. Afterward, the collected data were subjected to descriptive and statistical analysis: the measurable parameters were described as mean and standard deviation values. The academic and occupational characteristics variables were summarized by utilizing descriptive summary measures. The inferential statistics were produced by using non-parametric tests due to the non-normality aspect of the dependent variable. A statistical significance level was set at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$ , and computer software IBM SPSS Statistics 25 was applied to make all the corresponding calculations.

## Results

The current research investigated Saudi female teachers' opinions regarding teaching boys for the first time. It is worth mentioning that the demographic variables helped researchers to better evaluate the final results. Since the participants were only women, the gender factor has not been considered; instead, the research focused on three variables: qualifications, majors, and years of experience. Out of the total number of 208 cases, 65.4% were found to hold a Bachelor's degree. Furthermore, 27.4% of them majored in Islamic studies, 20.7% in Arabic language, and no less importantly, 40.9% have been teaching for more than 20 years. This demographic data has helped researchers to interpret and justify the study's results (see the Discussion section for details).

The answer to the first research question, "What are the opinions of female elementary educators regarding the experience of teaching boys for the first time?" has been analyzed through frequencies and percentages,

including means and standard deviations calculated for the following statements – 1; 9; 12 to 21 (see table below). Generally, the Saudi teachers' opinions of teaching boys for the first time were negative. The majority of the female elementary teachers (Mean± SD: 2.30 ± 0.74) stated that teaching boys for the first time has significantly affected their teaching performance. Additionally, the majority (Mean± SD: 2.21 ± 0.65) also reported that they rarely received administrative support from their school administration when dealing with classroom management behavioral problems caused by boys students. Moreover, they affirmed that school administration only occasionally (Mean± SD: 2.20 ± 0.69) was involved professionally in dealing with problems or issues that came up with parents. The majority (Mean± SD: 2.05 ± 0.72) further indicated that neither school administration provided the necessary training in management classroom techniques nor in psychological support. The teachers were asked about the educational assistance they had received from educational supervisors, to which the majority (Mean± SD: 2.00 ± 0.77) replied that they rarely provided any help with boy students' behavioral problems. Regarding how boys interacted during the teaching and learning process, most of the teachers (Mean± SD: 2.08 ± 0.65) confirmed that they occasionally responded to the questions in an interactive way.

Moreover, the teachers were asked if they believed that boys' academic performances would benefit from the learning experiences provided by female teachers, to which they replied that it would almost not have an effect on boy students' achievement levels (Mean± SD: 1.77 ± 0.81). Participants reported that parents' communication and involvement within the educational process were smooth (Mean± SD: 2.03 ± 0.71). The teachers were also asked about their perceptions considering differences in teaching girls and boys. The majority of them (Mean± SD: 1.70 ± 0.83) thought that such differences were relevant to consider when teaching. Another important aspect that the questionnaire covered was schools' infrastructure readiness to welcome the boy students. The majority of the teachers (Mean± SD: 1.62 ±

0.81) thought that school facilities were not ready. A lack of appropriate facilities that meet boys' specific needs in creating an environment that is suitable for their needs and safety was reported.

Lastly, teachers were also asked about the privilege they had as the first teachers involved in the new experience of teaching boys for the first time and the extra load that might be generated. The majority of the teachers (Mean± SD: 1.46 ± 0.75) indicated that they never had special privileges; neither their teaching loads were reduced. Most of them indicated that they never had the choice to be part of the new experience. Regarding teachers' general feelings about the new experience, the majority of the participants (Mean± SD: 1.44 ± 0.72) did not feel happy with the experience of teaching boys students.

**Table(1)**

Opinions of Female Elementary Teachers Regarding the Experience  
of Teaching Boys for the First Time

-	Statements	Always No. (%)	Sometimes No. (%)	Never No. (%)	Mean	SD	Rank
1	My performance in the classroom was critically affected due to introducing boys into all-girls classrooms.	97 46.6%	76 %36.5	35 %16.8	2.30	0.74	1
9	Male students react positively during the educational process.	53 %25.5	119 %57.2	36 %17.3	2.08	0.65	4
12	Contact with male students' parents is going smoothly.	56 %26.9	103 %49.5	49 %23.6	2.03	0.71	6
13	School facilities are properly equipped for teaching male students.	44 %21.2	41 %19.7	123 %59.1	1.62	0.81	10
14	School administration helps us when dealing with classroom problems caused by male students.	70 %33.7	112 %53.8	26 %12.5	2.21	0.65	2
15	The educational supervisor helps to resolve male students' behavioral problems.	62 %29.8	84 %40.4	62 %29.8	2.00	0.77	7

-	Statements	Always No. (%)	Sometimes No. (%)	Never No. (%)	Mean	SD	Rank
16	School administration protects me from problems with male students' parents.	74 %35.6	102 %49.0	32 %15.4	2.20	0.69	3
17	The school administration provides me with both the necessary management and psychological support.	59 %28.4	100 %48.1	49 %23.6	2.05	0.72	5
18	I have special privileges, such as fewer teaching hours and leave taking permissions, considering that I teach male students.	32 %15.4	32 %15.4	144 %69.2	1.46	0.75	11
19	I do not see any differences between teaching boys and girls.	49 %23.6	48 %23.1	111 %53.4	1.70	0.83	9
20	I feel happy when teaching male students.	28 %13.5	36 %17.3	144 %69.2	1.44	0.72	12
21	I believe that teaching male students will increase their achievement levels.	50 %24.0	61 %29.3	97 %46.6	1.77	0.81	8

The second question of the research , “What are the obstacles encountered by female teachers during the experience of teaching boys for the first time?” has been approached by analyzing frequency and percentage. The researchers calculated the means and standard deviation values for the statements that revealed the different obstacles encountered by female educators while teaching boys for the first time. Statements 2-8 and 10 -11 focused on this topic (see table 2 below).

One of the most reported obstacles encountered by female teachers related to gender differences was behavioral management issues. Boys' failure to do their homework (Mean± SD: 2.22 ± 0.66) was among the concerns of the teachers. In addition , the majority of the participants reported boys' lack of attention and constant distraction in the classroom (Mean± SD: 2.50 ± 0.67). Related to behavior problems, boys students tend to have the

inclination to use inappropriate words during the lessons (Mean± SD: 2.50 ± 0.67). Similarly, the teachers also agreed that it was quite difficult to carry out their lesson due to class disruptive behavior created by boys students such as the tendency to get involved in sudden and random fights or arguments. (Mean± SD: 2.44 ± 0.75).

Another obstacle reported was based on the fact that teachers actually needed to be trained pedagogically to teach those boys. As the majority of the teachers believe that they do not have the appropriate preparation for example, in classroom management and routines (Mean± SD: 2.08 ± 0.83), therefore, they find it hard to control and apply rules in the classroom (Mean± SD: 2.44 ± 0.68); as well as teach specific boys' skills, such as motor skills abilities (Mean± SD: 2.33 ± 0.76). Moreover, the teachers indicated that they needed intensive training courses to learn about boys' developmental characteristics and needs (Mean± SD: 2.09 ± 0.81) because the gap between what they had studied in college and what was actually encountered and applied in schools (Mean± SD: 2.21 ± 0.76).

**Table(2)**

Obstacles Encountered by Female Educators during the Experience of Teaching Boys for the First Time

-	Statements	Always No. (%)	Sometimes No. (%)	Never No. (%)	Mean	SD	Rank
2	There is no consensus between what has been studied in college and what is applied in schools.	86 41.3%	80 %38.5	42 %20.2	2.21	0.76	6
3	Male students fail at homework compliance.	73 %35.1	107 %51.4	28 %13.5	2.22	0.66	5
4	I suffer from boys' lack of attention in the classroom.	123 %59.1	65 %31.3	20 %9.6	2.50	0.67	1
5	I need intensive training courses to learn about boys' developmental characteristics and their specific needs.	78 %37.5	71 %34.1	59 %28.4	2.09	0.81	7

-	Statements	Always No. (%)	Sometimes No. (%)	Never No. (%)	Mean	SD	Rank
6	I find it very difficult to teach boys' skills (such as motor skills).	105 %50.5	67 %32.2	36 %17.3	2.33	0.76	4
7	I find it pretty hard to control and apply rules in the classroom.	113 %54.3	73 %35.1	22 %10.6	2.44	0.68	2
8	Male students say inappropriate things during the class.	124 %59.6	64 %30.8	20 %9.6	2.50	0.67	1
10	I believe that I do not have the required qualifications to teach boys, such as determination, strictness and loud voice.	81 %38.9	63 %30.3	64 %30.8	2.08	0.83	8
11	I find it very difficult to give the lessons because of how much male students fight each other.	124 %59.6	51 %24.5	33 %15.9	2.44	0.75	3

The last question the research sought to answer was whether there were significant differences in female elementary teachers' views towards the experience of teaching boys for the first time based on their academic background. The researchers focused on three specific variables: education level, specialization, and years of experience. Two analytical tests were utilized: the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run to assess whether the dependent variable follows a normal distribution; if not, the Kruskal-Wallis H test was later checked as a second test (instead of the one-way ANOVA). In general, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied to determine whether the three dependent variables (Education level, specialization, and years of experience) followed a normal distribution. The results were statistically significant for the dependent variable at  $P < 0.05$  (Table 3), which means that the probability that the data reached follows a normal distribution is very low.

Tests were statistically significant for the dependent variable (Opinions) according to the three levels of the independent variable "Education level"  $P < 0.05$  (Table A2), the three levels of the independent variable "Specialization/Major"  $P < 0.05$  (Table B2), and the two levels of the independent variable



"Experience"  $P < 0.05$  (Table B2). These results indicate that the probability that the research data follows a normal distribution is, once more, very low. Therefore, the researchers ran a non-parametric test (Kruskal-Wallis test) instead of the one-way ANOVA. Additionally, a Kruskal-Wallis H test showed no significant difference in Saudi female educators' opinions about the experience of teaching boys for the first time according to their education level – Kruskal-Wallis  $H = 6.913$ ,  $P = 0.141$  – indicating that the education level of female teachers has no effect on their opinions about such experience. The Kruskal-Wallis H test, however, showed that there were significant differences in female teachers' opinions in relation to their specialization, Kruskal-Wallis  $H = 16.579$ ,  $P = 0.035$  (less than .05), revealing that the "Major" variable has a relevant effect on the teachers' opinions about teaching boys for the first time. Lastly, the Kruskal-Wallis H test proved no significant difference in female teachers' opinions in relation to their years of experience – Kruskal-Wallis  $H = 7.638$ ,  $P = 0.177$  – indicating that years of experience have no effect on such opinions. Tables 3 through 9 summarize the results.

**Table(3)**  
Test of Normality

Statements	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Dependent variable (Opinions)	.105	208	.000	.961	208	.000

**Table(4)**  
Test of Normality for Education Level

-	Education level	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Dependent variable (Opinions)	Ph.D.	.385	3	.	.750	3	.000
	Master's Degree	.224	6	.200*	.962	6	.832
	Bachelor's	.096	136	.004	.976	136	.016
	Diploma/High Diploma	.156	57	.001	.860	57	.000
	Teachers' training institute	.228	6	.200*	.844	6	.139

a Lilliefors Significance Correction, \*This is a lower bound of the true significance

**Table(5)**

Tests of Normality for Specialization

-	Specialization	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Dependent variable (Opinions)	Arabic Language	.128	43	.073	.970	43	.322
	Sharia Sciences	.156	57	.001	.845	57	.000
	Mathematics	.109	23	.200*	.982	23	.932
	Art education	.130	22	.200*	.949	22	.306
	Sciences	.157	19	.200*	.951	19	.412
	Social Sciences	.263	11	.033	.806	11	.011
	Home Economics	.337	6	.031	.795	6	.053
	Physical Education	.	2	.			
	Others	.125	25	.200*	.974	25	.748

a Lilliefors Significance Correction, \*This is a lower bound of the true significance

**Table(6)**

Tests of Normality for Years of Experience

-	Experience (years)	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Dependent variable (Opinions)	1 to less than 5	.317	9	.009	.709	9	.002
	5 to 10	.080	51	.200*	.975	51	.353
	11 to 15	.123	17	.200*	.939	17	.308
	16 to 20	.129	45	.058	.961	45	.136
	More than 20	.126	85	.002	.979	85	.172

Note. Female elementary teachers' views towards the experience of teaching boys for the first time based on their education level is constant when Experience (years) = Less than 1 year. Thereby, this category has been omitted.

a Lilliefors Significance Correction, \*This is a lower bound of the true significance

**Table(7)**

Kruskal-Wallis Test for Differences in Female teachers' Opinions According to their Education Level

Ranks			
-	(Grouping variable) Educational levels	N	Mean Rank
	Ph.D.	3	21.00

-	(Grouping variable) Educational levels	N	Mean Rank
Female teachers' opinions towards the experience of teaching boys for the first time	Master's Degree	6	98.58
	Bachelor's	136	103.26
	Diploma/High Diploma	57	111.00
	Teachers' training institute	6	118.42
	Total	208	
Test Statistics			
Kruskal-Wallis H	6.913		
Df	4		
Sig.	.141 ns		

ns Not significant

**Table(8)**

Kruskal-Wallis Test for Differences in Female teachers' Opinions according to Specialization

Ranks			
-	(Grouping variable) Specialization/major	N	Mean Rank
Female teachers' opinions towards the experience of teaching boys for the first time	Arabic Language	43	103.47
	Sharia Sciences	57	112.99
	Mathematics	23	90.57
	Art education	22	108.93
	Sciences	19	119.03
	Social Sciences	11	46.73
	Home Economics	6	142.50
	Physical Education	2	123.00
	Others	25	99.62
	Total	208	
Test Statistics			
Kruskal-Wallis H	16.579		
Df	8		
Sig.	.035*		

\*Significant at 0.05 value level

Table(9)

Kruskal-Wallis Test for Differences in Female Teachers' Opinions According to their Experience

Ranks			
-	(Grouping variable) Experience (years)	N	Mean Rank
Female teachers' opinions towards the experience of teaching boys for the first time	Less than 1	1	123.00
	1 to less than 5	9	122.17
	5 to 10	51	114.09
	11 to 15	17	128.76
	16 to 20	45	99.41
	More than 20	85	94.50
	Total	208	
Test Statistics			
Kruskal-Wallis H	7.638		
Df	5		
Sig.	.177 ns		

ns Not significant

## Discussion

As mentioned above , the aim of the study was to explore the opinions of Saudi female elementary teachers with respect to their experiences in teaching boys for the first time. The results of the questionnaire indicated that teachers' overall opinions were negative towards their initial experiences. Several factors could have contributed to the overly negative opinions. Among the evidence of female teachers' negative opinions towards teaching boys was their response to item 20 , in which they directly expressed their unhappiness with the initial experience of teaching elementary boys without prior preparation.

The first factor contributing to the teachers' negative opinions is the minimum support they have received from both the school administration and educational supervisors. As for the school administration , 53.8% reported that the support only was there sometimes. Taking into

consideration the necessary management and psychological support , 48.1% stated that only sometimes school administration provided teachers with such mechanisms , whereas 49.0% of the participants affirmed that sometimes school administration had involved professionally with problems with students' parents. This indicates that most of the burden directly led the teachers to find their way into the new experience. This finding is consistent with Al-Sakani's study (2011) that showed there are many problems that originate from school administration and were the highest in schools with feminized education.

Concerning educational supervisors' assistance , 40.4% of the teachers stated that only sometimes school professionals brought in help to resolve boy students' behavioral problems. This problem mainly occurs because educational supervisors are not often aware of the teachers' exact needs (Abubakar , 2018). In addition , 69.2% of the participants reported that they had never had any privileges related to reducing the workloads. The study results are consistent with the findings of Al-Lamie (2002) and Al-Sakani (2011) , who showed that problems caused by dealing with boys were primarily due to the lack of support from the respective school administrations.

The second factor contributing to the teachers' negative opinions is the poor training teachers had received to manage behavioral problems caused by boy students. In fact , 53.4% of the participants indicated that there were apparent differences between teaching boys and girls. Additionally , the majority of the participants (46.6%) stated that introducing boys into all-girls classrooms severely affected their teaching performances during lessons. Saudi female teachers have never taught boys in public schools before , and even though a large number of the teachers have a long teaching experience that exceeds twenty years , they could have found it extremely difficult to adapt to a whole new teaching experience. Additionally , considering their lack of prior preparation and training , the shift from their comfort zone in which they had only been teaching girls for a long time was very difficult for them.

Furthermore , 46.6% of the participants thought that teaching boys might not improve students' achievement despite previous studies that have actually found a positive impact of teachers' gender on students' academic achievements (Farghali & Abdeen , 2017; Zuhd , 2018; Youssef, 2021). Teachers' novice experience could explain the previous result. In the current research , 57.2% of the female participants affirmed that boys only sometimes respond with positive behavior during the teaching and learning processes. The reason for this opinion might be explained in terms of how teachers manage the class with minimal expertise on how to deal with boys students.

The third factor that could contribute to the teachers' negative opinions is parental communication. 49.5% of the female teachers reported that communication with parents was going smoothly utilizing different means , such as the utilization of social media platforms such as WhatsApp groups to facilitate the communication process more effectively; however, not enough. This low percentage of parental involvement could be explained in terms of the unwillingness of some parents to communicate with the teachers on a regular basis; and their previous experiences with male teachers; consequently , they end up putting all the burden on the schools and teachers (Al-Anzi , 2020). Further investigation into the topic related to parents' role in the implementation process of the Esnad Initiative will help shed light on important topics related to parents' role in the new experience for their boy students.

The final factor contributing to the teachers' negative opinions to the schools' weak infrastructure. 59.1% of the participants believed that school facilities , such as play playgrounds and boys' restrooms , were not appropriately equipped to suit boys' needs. Many studies have reported similar problems related to schools' readiness to welcome boys in female schools (Al-Lamie , 2002; Lamatenggo & Panigoro , 2017; and Jamil & Ilyas , 2018). These studies confirmed that well-equipped schools that provide all the necessary facilities for both genders would help improve the educational process.

The research also highlighted the obstacles encountered by teachers when teaching boys for the first time. Evidently, the critical lack of prior preparation has affected teachers' performances within the classroom. Moreover, the lack of student discipline is confirmed by almost all participants as the main obstacle that hinders total pupils' engagement. Indeed, questionnaire items did not only investigate the difficulties that fall under classroom management, such as the lack of attention and behavioral problems but also 59.6% of participants reported that boys students always tend to use inappropriate words during the lesson. In addition, boy students' sudden and random interrupted fights were reported by 59.6% of the teachers, and 54.3% of them found it difficult to control and apply the appropriate corresponding rules to deal with these incidents. The researchers believe these problems and obstacles can be effectively solved through appropriate training and integral classroom management. These obstacles can be overcome by preparing teachers before leading a classroom with boy students. Furthermore, Komar (2010) and McKnight (2015) indicated that gender behavioral expectations and learning styles for both genders call for curriculum revision and teaching methods to meet these differences. As for psychological support, it is fundamentally important to identify both the personal characteristics of the female teachers and the training they need to teach boy students. One of the reasons that might explain the result is that teachers could be frustrated because they thought that they had led a successful classroom providing great experiences for girls students and in this new experience, they were not.

Lastly, considering the variable related to teachers' majors, the study revealed significant differences related to teachers' majors and their opinions. Most participants (65.4%) hold Bachelor's degrees majoring in Arabic language (20.7%) and Islamic Studies (27.4%). Al-Lamie (2005) claimed that teachers' majors influence their opinions regarding coeducation. Teachers' negative opinions could be explained by their religious background. Those teachers might hold on to some Islamic rules that call for separation

between boys and girls. Years of experience and education level, though, have no relevant significance on the different opinions of teachers; this finding contradicts Al-Lamie's study, which showed that teachers who had a long-standing teaching experience presented positive opinions towards educating boys students.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This research aimed to investigate the new experience Saudi female teachers had when teaching boys for the first time. The researchers specifically focused on exploring some positive or negative factors that may have contributed to the overall experience. Hence, the results of the present study helped shed light on the obstacles faced by the teachers without any intended purpose of solving them or to find their respective solutions. Furthermore, this research did not aim to claim whether the feminization of teaching in Saudi Arabia is right or wrong nor to discuss its benefits to young learners.

Two main results came out of the discussion of this research. First, the negative teaching experience reported by the participants was mainly due to extrinsic obstacles such as the lack of adequate educational preparation, insufficient administrative support, boys' lack of discipline, and weak numeracy and literacy knowledge among boys students compared to the girls. Second, further research is needed to track the benefits, as well as the problems, generated by introducing the feminization of elementary education into Saudi culture. Moreover, future research studies should focus on other factors, such as teachers' expertise, the size of the class, and the socio-economic aspects that could affect students' performance from both genders.

To conclude, female teachers' opinions about teaching boys, in fact, were affected by all the above-mentioned obstacles. Furthermore, as the case is always with newly launched programs, resistance to modifications becomes an issue that adds more burden to the teachers' workload. Therefore, the researchers recommend follow-up research on the initiative for better



understanding. For instance , schools should start working on providing better facilities , such as playgrounds , and move to schools that have spacious classrooms to meet boys' needs. Schools should also start developing a plan for female teachers to be equipped with the knowledge needed to successfully be part of the changing education model in Saudi Arabia. Teachers should be encouraged to participate in training programs on behavioral problem management. The goal of the training programs would be to raise awareness about sensory-perception differences , physical differences , biological differences , and brain-based genetic differences between girls and boys to enhance teachers' performances (Bonomo , 2010).

## Limitations

The findings of the current study are limited to Saudi female teachers' opinions in Riyadh public schools. Therefore , generalizations cannot be made. In addition , the researchers could not reach all the teachers involved in the initial experience within 52 schools. Only 208 responded to the questionnaire. Lastly , it should be noted that the questionnaire was administered by the Ministry directly using teachers' emails and Whatsapp not directly by the researchers.

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