



من تعليم منفصل الى تعليم مختلط: دراسة مقارنة انطباعات الطلاب السعوديين
الإناث والذكور الدارسين في جامعة أكرون تجاه تجربة التأقلم مع التعليم المختلط

**From Singular To Mixed: A Comparative Study Of The
Perceptions Of Male And Female Saudi Students
At The University Of Akron In Adapting
To The Coeducation Experience.**

Prepare

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نبذة مختصرة:

في هذه الدراسة، بحثت في كيف يرى الطلاب السعوديين في جامعة أكرون تجربة التعليم المختلط كأفراد نشأوا في بيئة ثقافية ونظام تعليمي طبيعته الفصل بين الجنسين، واستكشاف أي اختلافات في مثل هذه التصورات والخبرات بين الذكور والإناث. وكان الهدف من هذه الدراسة العثور على إجابات لأربعة أسئلة. (أ) كيف يرى الطلاب السعوديين، كمنتجات من نظام تعليم من جنس واحد وثقافة الفصل بين الجنسين، إلى تجربة التعليم المختلط أثناء حضورهم البرامج الأكاديمية المختلطة في الولايات المتحدة؟ (ب) هل تجربة المرأة السعودية للتعليم المختلط في الولايات المتحدة مختلف عن تجربة الرجل؟ (ج) هل جنس الطالب عاملاً في إعاقة أو تسريع التكيف مع هذا التغيير؟ أم الوقت الذي يقضيه في التعليم المختلط؟ أم أنها على حد سواء؟ (د) كيف يمكن التخفيف من التحديات المتصورة للتكيف مع التعليم المختلط في الخارج؟

ولمعالجة مشكلة البحث والأسئلة، طبقت منهجية دراسة وتحليل الظواهر، والتي شملت تحليل تصورات أربعة طلاب سعوديين تم اختيارهم عشوائياً، مختلفين في الجنس ومستوى التعليم والوقت الذي قضوه في الولايات المتحدة، للوصول إلى تقييم معبر للظاهرة موضوع الدراسة.

وخلصت إلى أن الطلاب السعوديين الذين يدرسون في برنامجاً أكاديمياً في الولايات المتحدة قد يكون لديهم تصورات وتجارب مختلفة تختلف وفقاً لجنسهم، ومدة تكيفهم مع التعليم المختلط، وخاصة خلال الفصل الدراسي الأول. ومع ذلك، بعد بقائهم لمدة كافية في بيئة التعليم المختلط، يحقق الطلاب السعوديون، من الذكور والإناث، مستوى مماثل من التكيف مع الاختلاف الثقافي في التعليم المختلط ليكونوا قادرين على التفاعل بشكل فعال مع الطلاب غير السعوديين من الجنس الآخر بينما ما زالوا يواجهون مستويات مختلفة من التوتر والصعوبة والإحراج عند التفاعل مع الطلاب السعوديين من الجنس الآخر.

وقد أجازت اللجنة الدراسة وأوصت بنشره في كبرى الدوريات في علوم الاجتماع والتربية، كما تم نشر الدراسة على مكتبة أوهايو البحثية.

SUMMARIZATION

INTRODUCTION

- The Kingdom's culture, which combines elements of both Islam and the Arabic ethnicity of its people, is considered to be conservative, especially concerning issues of gender. In this culture, men and women are formally required and expected to study, work and socialize in gender-segregated environments, with the exception of close family members.
- Thus, it is but a social norm that members of opposite genders interact in a respective, afar and limited manner. Due to such a culture, schools and universities are divided according to gender, and as a result, people of Saudi Arabia educated through a single-sex education system.
- In 2005, the Kingdom initiated an annual scholarship program, which presents the opportunity for thousands of young Saudi men and women to pursue their higher education abroad. However, while the program gives the applicant the opportunity to choose among several countries, such as the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, France, China, Japan among others, a significant portion of them prefer to attend their studies in the U.S.
- Due to the different cultures, and social and institutional norms of these countries, many Saudi students attending universities abroad have reported several academic and social challenges when attempting to adjust to such differences.
- While there have been several studies that have investigated the adjustment issues and challenges facing Saudi students attending educational programs abroad, there has been but limited studies that focus on issues related the impact of experiencing a mixed gender education for the first time. Moreover, I have found that none of such studies have compared the perceptions and experiences of Saudi male students to those of Saudi female students in adjusting to the new cultural norm of coeducation.
- Thus, I identified the research problem for my study as the following: **to understand how Saudi students, both men and women, adjust to the phenomena of coeducation as**

students at the University of Akron, and to infer from their perceptions and experiences whether the gender of the student influences their adjustment strategies.

- I had identified the research questions as, (1) How do Saudi students, as products of a single-sex education system and a gender-segregated culture, perceive the coeducation experience while attending academic programs in the U.S.? (2) Do Saudi women perceive the coeducational experience of the U.S. differently from Saudi men? (3) Is the gender of the student a factor in hindering or accelerating adjustment to this new norm? Or is it the time spent in a coeducation setting? Or is it both? (4) How may the perceived challenges for adapting to coeducation be mitigated or resolved?
- The purpose of this study was to phenomenologically study the perceptions, experiences of male and female Saudi students experiencing a coeducation setting, and compare the perceptions and experiences of each gender in accordance to intercultural adjustment models and theories, and in the light of related previous studies.
- I was motivated to focus my research in this topic due to my belief in its significance. I found (1) little research on the impact of transferring from a single-sex education setting to a coeducation setting on international students, the role of gender in acculturation processes and social adaptation in general, and the adjustment to unfamiliar gender-related norms specifically, and (2) that perspective Saudi students interested in studying in the U.S., have a minimal understanding to the reality of cultural differences, in addition to the perceived and/or experienced challenges and opportunities of studying amidst a coeducation setting. Because of this, I find this study to be of heightened importance, as it may be beneficial to future Saudi students in the U.S., faculty at UA, and future research related to acculturation and social adjustment theories, models and strategies, especially for international students from Saudi Arabia and other countries of similar gender and social norms.

- However, I saw that there may be some limitations to this study, such as:
 1. I am from the same country and culture of the participants, and thus I experience the same phenomena as the participants, additionally, I am also attending the same institution. This relation may have affected the responses of the participants.
 2. This study excludes other nationalities of similar cultural values and social norms. Thus, although other countries and communities of similar cultural values and social norms may benefit from the findings of the study, it is important to acknowledge that the study was focused on Saudis alone, and studies of other nationalities may produce different findings.
 3. This study analyzes the students of a specific institution in a specific time period and studies of students in other institutions may have different results, due to the differences in educational and social environmental settings from one institution to another and the tendency of cultures and social norms to evolve and change over time.
 4. This study analyzes and compares the perceptions and experiences of four students, and research on a larger sample may produce different results.
 5. This study uses a qualitative phenomenological methodology to analyze and compare the perceptions and experiences of the participants in a coeducation setting. Research into this problem that uses a different methodology may produce different results.
 6. Only the nationality, length of stay in the U.S., and the gender of the participant were considered, and other factors such as social identity, educational background, socio-economic status, maturity and marital status among others were not considered. Future research that includes these variables may produce different results.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- The theoretical framework of this study relied on 3 theoretical foundations, all of which I believe to be related to the focus of the investigation, and all of which were used in analyzing the reported perceptions and experiences of Saudi students attending a coeducational program at the University of Akron. These theoretical lenses are gender identity theories, social identity theories, and acculturation theories and models.
- By presenting gender identity theories, I explored how an individual develops his or her gender identity, which I believe has a role in the participant's adjustment to coeducation. I reported on Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory, Kohlberg's Cognitive-Developmental Theory, and The Learning Theory.
- By presenting the social identity theory, I attempted to explore how an individual acquires his social identity and associates himself with a social group. I also found this related to the focus of the study, for the participants come from a social group (Saudi Arabia) and attempt to adjust to another (U.S.).
- By presenting acculturation models and theories, I attempted to present an understanding to the adjustment stages and levels individuals experience when moving to an unfamiliar cultural environment. I discussed Oberg's Culture shock theory, Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory and Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. I later used these theories and models to analyze and compare the adjustment of male Saudi students to female Saudi students in relation to coeducation.
- I also discussed the contextual factors of the participants, such as gender and social identities in Saudi Arabia, with a particular relation to the mixing of gender, and I discussed previous studies that had explored the topic of this study.
- From these previous studies, I had found that there were two reoccurring themes:

1. That Saudi Male and Female Students Perceive and Experience Coeducation Differently.
2. That Saudi Students Perceive that the Stress associated with Experiencing Coeducation Decreases with Length of Stay.

METHODOLOGY

- In the 3rd chapter, I discussed why I had chosen the phenomenology research method for this study.
- I mentioned that:
 1. I was guided to this decision by the research questions, through which I study the perceptions and experiences of the participants to coeducation, and by the notion that a phenomenological study is one that focuses on studying a phenomenon from the subjective perspective, and that was the objective of this study.
 2. and that I used this methodology so I may analyze and compare the perceptions and experiences of Saudi Female students to those of Saudi male students.
- I then explored the phenomenology research methodology, its two approaches and eight procedures.
- In this chapter, I also presented my sampling procedures which included distributing an invitation letter and questionnaire amongst Saudi students attending the University of Akron, asking them to assign to themselves a pseudonym of their choice and identify their gender, how long they have been in the U.S., the program they are currently enrolled in at UA, and means of contact such as email and/or cell phone. The letter also presented information regarding the purpose of the study, the method through which the data will be collected, how I will preserve their privacy and confidentiality, and the estimated time required for the interview.
- After collecting and analyzing the responses, I had selected four participants who were willing to participate in the study and who were of the following characteristics:

1. One Saudi male student attending the English language program at UA, and has spent 6 months in the U.S. or less.
 2. One Saudi female student attending the English language program at UA, and has spent more than 6 months in the U.S.
 3. One Saudi male student attending an academic program at UA (undergraduate/graduate/doctoral), and has spent 6 months in the U.S. or less.
 4. One Saudi female student attending an academic program at UA (undergraduate /graduate /doctoral), and has spent more than 6 months in the U.S.
- I had identified these characteristics, because I wanted to incorporate in this study individuals who
 1. to some extent represent the population; Saudi students of both genders who are attending universities in the U.S. for different lengths of time,
 2. and have experienced the phenomenon of adjusting to coeducation.
 - As for my data collection procedures, I had conducted individual interviews with each participant at a different time and location. These interviews were digitally recorded and latter their response were transcribed and analyzed.
 - Before conducting the interview, I had presented each participant with an informed consent in English and Arabic, which included an introduction to the study, and its purpose, procedures, exclusions, risks and discomforts, and benefits. In addition to the participants right to withdraw from the study and their anonymity, the confidentiality of records, the means of documenting their responses, and how they contact the investigator or her supervisor.
 - The interview consisted of asking the participants a series of questions that covered three different periods:
 1. Their perceptions to coeducation before their arrival to the U.S.
 2. Their perceptions to coeducation and their experiences during the first month and semester.
 3. And their current perceptions to coeducation.

- The objective behind asking them questions that covered these periods was to understand their adjustment progress and to be capable of comparing this development and adjustment of participants of one gender to the other and the role of time in this regards.
- Before beginning the data collection procedures, and in compliance with the IRB regulations, I had taken the CITI training which I had passed with a full grade, and applied an exemption request from the IRB Human subject research requirement, which I was approved for.
- Each participant had the choice of conducting the interview in Arabic or English, and each of them had preferred Arabic. Each interview had lasted approximately 40 minutes.
- The collected information and data from the surveys, the recordings of the interview, and the transcriptions, in addition to all other documents related to the study, were saved on the investigator's personal computer and in a password-locked folder in a remote location on the local drive. No copies of any correspondence, recordings or transcripts were made.
- Finally, I described how I would present the data, which included bracketing out my own personal experiences, a textural description, a structural description, developing themes, an invariant structures that included relating the findings to the theoretical framework and pervious studies.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

- In chapter 4, I started by bracketing out my own experiences, as to view the experiences of the participants through a fresh perspective and to differentiate between my experiences and perceptions and those of the participants, as required by the phenomenological methodology.
- Next, I presented the response of each participant, and described their perceptions and experiences during their adjustment to coeducation and to the phenomenon in general. I made sure to describe their responses as they had

reported them with the minimum of interpretation. (textural description)

- After that, I had explored the circumstances and factors that may have influenced their perceptions and experiences, and their level of adjustment to coeducation. (structural description).
- I then analyzed their responses and developed 17 themes that covered the three determined periods.
- I found that the Themes from the Period Prior to Initiating Studies in a Coeducation Program were that,
 1. All Participants had developed a Premonition about Education and Coeducation in U.S.
 2. None of the Participants had identified any Specific Situations or Challenges they wished to Avoid in Coeducation.
 3. All Participants believed that any Challenges they meet in Coeducation should be resolved by Themselves.
- While I found that the Themes from the First Month and First Semester in Coeducation were,
 1. A Mutual Feeling of Stress and Anxiety on the First Day.
 2. Intense Feelings of Embarrassment and Discomfort during the Initial Interactions with Saudi Students of the Opposite Sex.
 3. An Unexpected Ease to interact with Non-Saudi Students of the Opposite Sex.
 4. Female Participants found their Initial Perceptions and Expectations of experiencing a Coeducation Program had Little Impact on the First Interaction with Non-Saudi Students from the Opposite Sex.
 5. The Experiences of Female Participants with Male Teachers were influenced by their Original Social Norms.
 6. Female Participants were Concerned with the View of Others, and to Resolve this Issue They Sought to Clarify their Positions to those Concerned.

7. Female Participants had Preferred to Join Groups of Female-Only Students During the First Month.
 8. Participants had Normalized Coeducation before the End of their First Semester in their Program.
- Finally, I found that the Themes from the Participants' Current Perceptions were that,
 1. The Participants Believe that their Current Perceptions to Coeducation are Different from their Initial Perceptions.
 2. All Participants Continue to Find Difficulty in Interacting with Saudi Students of the Opposite Sex.
 3. Female Participants Predict that their Perceptions and Experiences are the Same as those of Male Students.
 4. All Participants would Prefer to Continue their Studies in the U.S. in a Coeducation Program.
 5. Male Participants would Prefer to Work in a Mixed Gender Setting in the U.S.
 6. All Participants would Prefer to Work in a Single Sex Setting in Saudi Arabia. Ayman, Amira, Khaled and Um Hala mentioned that they would prefer to work in a single sex work environment in Saudi Arabia, and related this decision to the social norms of Saudi Arabia.
 - I then attempted to relate and analyze this data in light of the theoretical framework and previous studies.
 - In relation to gender identity theories, I found that
 1. Male participants had associated themselves with behaviors and attitudes of Saudi men, and female participants had associated themselves with behaviors and attitudes of Saudi women. It appeared that female students were concerned with maintaining their identity as Saudi women who wear Hijab, do not gain close proximity to men, value hearsay and social opinion, and are expected to be less confident than men. While male participants saw it their responsibility to not embarrass Saudi female students by avoiding or limiting their interactions

with them and ensuring that they do not cause them any discomfort.

2. That these gender-specific behaviors and attitudes had changed after time. Female participants said that they now possess the confidence to actively interact with male students, can function in close proximity to unrelated men, and their concern of how others may view their identity or interactions in coeducation has lessened considerably. While male participants mentioned that they now interact with female students more actively, and expectations of causing embarrassment have lessened. It appears that during their time in a coeducation program, the study's participants have altered their gender identities, even if marginally and temporary, through social experiences, environmental factors and cognitive processing. They have understood that gender identities in the U.S. differ from the gender identities in Saudi Arabia, and they have adjusted their behaviors and attitudes to simulate those of the U.S. while attending a coeducation program.
- In relation to the Social Identity Theory, I found that there is a level of conflict in participants' social identity.
 1. The participants reported to become adjusted to coeducation and see that attending classes with the opposite sex to be normal, which is behavior consistent to the social norms and identity of U.S. students. However, they also report that they still find various levels of difficulty and embarrassment to interact with Saudi students of the opposite sex, which is consistent to the Saudi social identity.
 2. Moreover, all of the participants mentioned that they would prefer to continue to study in a mixed gender setting in the U.S., but upon returning to Saudi Arabia they would prefer to join a single sex setting. Thus, it appears that their social identity is contextual and temporary, for while in the U.S. they associate themselves and demonstrate behavior consistent to

social identity of American students, when amongst Saudis they associate themselves and demonstrate behavior consistent to the social identity of Saudi students. Thus, while attending a coeducational program in the U.S. the participants categorized themselves with two social identity groups; a permanent Saudi identity that prohibits coeducation and a temporary American identity that normalizes coeducation, and they shift their association from one group to the other according to the context, agents and environment.

- In relation to acculturation models and theories, I found that the participants had demonstrated levels of adjustment and adaptation to the unfamiliar norm of coeducation.
- Firstly, in relation to Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory, which presented the concept of an ongoing stress and adaptation cycle that leads to growth and cultural adaptation,
 1. I found that the participants had expressed experiencing feelings that may cause stress, such as unfamiliarity, embarrassment and discomfort, especially during the first month and semester. To resolve this stress, the participants had mentioned that they had focused their attention on empowering themselves with new attitudes and behaviors. They mentioned that when they felt stress and anxiety during their initial interactions with members of the opposite sex, they had either focused on developing their English to be capable of communicating with non-Saudi students of the opposite sex, or building their confidence to interact with Saudi students of the opposite sex. Other than the first semester, it was not clear whether the participants had continued to experience stressful problems, and thus I can not confirm that the stress-learning cycle was repetitive as suggested by Kim.
 2. Kim had also suggested that the stress-learning experience would produce growth and cultural

adaptation over time, and I found this to be true, as they had mentioned that they now view coeducation as normal.

3. Additionally, Kim mentioned that the stress-learning experience would result in three facets; functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity. By analyzing the responses of the participants, I find that they have realized a level of functional fitness. I also found that, aside from the initial stress they experienced during the first month and semester and the continued embarrassment they reported to experience from their interactions with Saudi students of the opposite sex, they now enjoy a high level of psychological health. Finally, I find that, as Kim had suggested, the participants now have an intercultural identity. Currently, they associate themselves with attitudes and behaviors of both the Saudi and the U.S. cultures.
 4. However, their responses also illustrated that this intercultural identity may be temporary and contextual, for the participants had mentioned that while in the U.S. they would prefer to study in a coeducational program, but upon returning to Saudi they would prefer to join a single sex setting.
 5. I did not find any differences in this focus between female and male participants.
- Secondly, in relation to Oberg's Culture Shock Theory that suggested that culture shock, generates a two-phase reaction from the individuals who experience it. First they reject the new cultural environment and then the home cultural environment becomes of heightened importance to the individuals, and they view it only through a positive lens.
 1. In relating these reactions to the response of the participants, I did not find this true, for they did not report rejecting coeducation at any phase, neither did they report that their home cultural environment had increased in importance.

2. As for relating the four stages of cultural shock; honeymoon, an aggressive attitude to the host environment, recovery and full adjustment, to the responses of the participants, I find that the participants experiences were not consistent to these stages.
- While Amira had expressed feelings of excitement on this first day, which can interpreted as experiencing the honeymoon stage, the other participants had not reported experiencing similar feelings.
 - As for the second stage, none of the participants had expressed aggressive or hostile attitudes or behaviors towards the host environment or its members.
 - As for the third stage, which is recovery, it appears that the participants had experienced difficulties as result of attending a coeducation program, but they had learn to deal with them and achieve recovery.
 - As for the fourth stage, in which the individual would have achieved full adaptation, the participants of this study reported that they now see coeducation as a norm. They had mentioned that they would prefer to continue to attend a coeducation program, even if they had the option to transfer to a single sex education program, which may translate as seeing coeducation as but another way of living. However, Oberg had suggested in his theory that individuals who reach this stage would even long for the adapted culture when they return to their home environment, and I did not find this true for this investigation. This investigation did not include participants who had competed their studies and returned to Saudi Arabia, and thus I can not comment on the perceptions, experiences and attitudes of such group to coeducation and test their preferences. However, the participants of this study did mentioned that they would prefer to join a single sex setting, and not a mixed gender setting, upon returning to Saudi Arabia, which may illustrate that they have achieved

a temporary and contextual adaptation to coeducation.

3. Finally, I did not find any significant differences in relating the findings of this study to this theory between female and male participants.
- Thirdly, in relating the responses of the participants to the six stages of Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, which are denial, defence, minimization, acceptance, adaptation and integration, I found that there were no differences between the stages of intercultural sensitivity of female and male participants.
 1. I found that during the first few days, it appeared that the participants were experiencing the Defense stage, as the participants had expressed comments that illustrate a categorization of two groups; them (non Saudi students) and us (Saudi students). They saw that coeducation was different and not as the norm of separate sex education to which they were accustomed, and this unfamiliarity was the source of stress for them. Their feelings and experiences during this phase may be because they saw coeducation as abnormal, wrong or unfamiliar.
 2. I also found that the participants had later attempted to find similarities between the two cultures, which may be understood as experiencing the Minimization stage.
 3. By the end of the first semester, the participants reported that they had become comfortable attending a coeducation program, which may translate as experiencing the Acceptance stage. During this phase, they reported having positive perceptions, feelings and experiences as students in a coeducation program, and no longer shed away from interacting with students of the opposite sex. They had become aware that separate sex education was a norm in the Saudi culture and coeducation was a norm in the American culture, and they accepted this difference

and learned to apply the norm in accordance to the context and agents.

4. By analyzing the comments of the participants that illustrated their current thoughts, perceptions and experiences as students in a coeducation program, I believe that all of the participants, both male and female, can be categorized as experiencing the Adaptation phase and not the Integration phase. This is because I found that the comments of the participants illustrate that they have learned to function in coeducation as members of the host cultural environment do. However, this adaptation appears to be temporary as they mention feeling embarrassed when interacting with Saudi students, which may be a context and stimuli for the original norms of the Saudi culture to become predominant. Moreover, while they would prefer to continue in a coeducation program in the U.S., they expressed their preference of joining a separate sex setting when returning to their home cultural environment. Thus, and in relation to coeducation, it appears that they function according to the cultural frame of the situation, all of which are characteristics of individuals experiencing the adaptation stage.
5. As for the Integration stage, I do not believe that the participants have reached this level of cross-cultural adaption. This is because an individual who experiences this stage typically “construe their identities at the margins of two or more cultures and central to none”, and by analyzing the participants’ responses, I find that the Saudi culture is still their central culture and reference. The participants still identify themselves as Saudis, although they currently associate themselves with aspects of the American culture. I did not find any significant difference in the level or stage of cultural sensitivity between male and female participants, and all had

reached the stage of Adaptation during a similar period.

- By analyzing the Findings of the Study in Context of Previous Studies, I found that the previous mentioned two themes, which are (That Saudi Male and Female Students Perceive and Experience Coeducation Differently. And That Saudi Students Perceive that the Stress associated with Experiencing Coeducation Decreases with Length of Stay.) were only partially repeated.

1. In relation to the first theme, I found that in agreement with this theme, it appeared that female participants of this study were concerned with issues such as Hijab, the view of others towards their relations and identity, how they would interact with male teachers, and working within groups of female-only students. These challenges and issues were unique to the female participants, and might have influenced their perceptions and experiences in adjusting to coeducation. However, and in contrast to this theme, both male and female participants in this study had expressed similar feelings of anxiety, stress and embarrassment during the first month and semester in a coeducation program. Additionally, they found it extremely difficult to interact with Saudi students of the opposite sex during that period, and they reported that they still experience various levels of such a difficulty to this day.

2. By relating to the second theme, I found that while all participants believe that they have adjusted to coeducation, they all agree that interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex to continue to be challenging and difficult. If Saudi students continue to find it difficult to interact with Saudi students of the opposite sex, then one can infer that they may continue to experience various degrees of difficulty as students in a coeducation program. Thus, this reported difficulty partially contradicts with the mentioned second theme, which claimed that with

the passing of time, the difficulty Saudi students perceive or experience lessens with the passing of time. Hence, while this study finds that with the passing of time difficulty lessens for Saudi students in coeducation program, this study also finds that this is only the case when interacting with non-Saudi students of the opposite sex.

- What does this mean for The Ministry of Higher Education in the U.S.?
 1. It means that it should include in its mandatory preparation program and orientation for Saudi students who wants to study abroad intercultural sensitivity workshops that present students with the information and skills to navigate and adapt to the new cultural environment and norms of the U.S., which includes coeducation. A suggested approach would be to invite Saudi students, male and female, who have completed their studies in the U.S. to lead such workshops and discussions. Additionally, the program should include an illustrative comparison to the similarities and differences between higher education, teacher-student relationships, and common instructional methods in Saudi Arabia and the U.S. Possessing such information and skills may help in lessening the impact and duration of initial stress resulting from the unfamiliar cues and norms of the U.S. cultural environment. I mention this, because none of the participants had mentioned the Ministry as a source of information when describing how they developed their initial perceptions of education and coeducation in the U.S. before arriving in the U.S.
 2. I also recommended that the Ministry of Higher Education, as the party most concerned with the outcome of Saudi students studying abroad, supervise and authorize a lengthy and broad assessment and study of the challenges that Saudi students experience as a result of attending a coeducation program.
- What does this mean for the University of Akron?

- It means that while other international students may find coeducation familiar, Saudi students have virtually no experience with this norm and have never attended a class with a teacher of the opposite sex.
 1. Therefore it may be beneficial that teachers and administrators at the English Language Institute at The University of Akron, as the first program Saudi students typically enroll in upon arriving to the U.S., acknowledge such issues and implement measures to mitigate such feelings. Of such measures is gradually introducing Saudi students to the common practices in a coeducation program, such as group assignments. For example, the teacher can permit Saudi students to work with other students of the same gender during the first month. Later, after the first month, Saudi students would be permitted to join groups of non-Saudi students of the opposite sex. Finally, and when the teacher finds that Saudi students are capable of functioning and interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex, they should encourage group activities between them. This requires continuous evaluation and observation to the social interactions of Saudi students of opposite sexes.
 2. It may also be beneficial that teachers who lead classes that include Saudi students of the opposite sex to acknowledge the cultural differences between the Saudi and American cultures.
- What does this mean for future Saudi students who intend to attend their studies in the U.S.?
- It means that that prospective Saudi students are encouraged to research education and coeducation in the U.S. before initiating their studies in the U.S.
 1. There are many intermediaries that can be utilized for this objective, such as documentaries about education in the U.S., information and multimedia on the websites of American universities, studies that describe culture shock and cultural sensitivity and adaptation, and the cultural norms of the U.S.

2. By obtaining information from various sources, students will be capable of envisioning themselves attending an educational program in the U.S. and through such vision, they would have the ability to predict and consequently identify potential challenges and possible strategies to resolve them.
3. This information will also help them decide whether they are willing and capable of adjusting to the cultural norms of the U.S., which include coeducation.
 - What does this mean for future research?
 - Because I have found a shortage of studies that
 1. Analyze and research how individuals from cultures that normalize the separation of sexes in social and formal contexts adapt to cultures that normalize the mixing of genders.
 2. Explore how members of a culture interact with each other whilst living in another cultural environment.
 3. Discuss how Saudi students in the U.S. interact with other Saudi students of the opposite sex.
 - I believe that this focus deserves the attention of researchers, especially those concerned with issues related to Saudi students studying abroad, in addition to sociology, psychology, educational foundations, education counseling, and cross-cultural adaptation.
 - Therefore, I recommended that the mentioned groups embark on research that further analyzes these relationships, apply other research methodologies, increase the sample size, include other variables and test the findings of this study.
 - Such research may produce results that can assist Saudi students in adjusting to coeducation and interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex, which this study finds to be the predominant source of stress for Saudi students attending a coeducation program at The University of Akron.

SUMMARY

- In summary, I found that while there are differences between the perceptions and experiences of Saudi female and male

students attending a coeducation program at The University of Akron, the participants, male and female, had also reported to have similar perceptions and experiences in adjusting to coeducation.

- In the context of the previous studies, I found that the themes I had developed from the responses of the participants partially differed from the themes of such studies, and add new themes that were not previously identified. The foremost significant new theme is that Saudi students, and regardless of length of stay and exposure to coeducation, continue to experience difficulty and embarrassment when interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex, and not with non-Saudi students of the opposite sex.
- In the context of theories, this theme may translate as achieving a temporary level of cultural adaptation to coeducation, and acquiring a contextual and temporary intercultural social identity.
- Thus, I conclude that Saudi students attending a coeducation program in the U.S. may have different perceptions and experiences that differ according to their gender, during their adjustment to coeducation, and especially during the first semester. However, after gaining sufficient exposure to coeducation, Saudi students, both male and female, achieve a similar level of adaptation and adjustment to the cultural difference of coeducation to be capable of interacting effectively and stressfully with non-Saudi students of the opposite sex. However, they still may experience various levels of stress, difficulty and embarrassment when interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex.

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