FEMALE UNIVERSITY LECTURERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ACADEMIC PRACTICE IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Happy to share this PPT

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Overview

1. Introduction:
   - What is this project about?
   - What is this study about?
2. Women in education and the workforce in Saudi Arabia & rationale for this study
3. The study
4. First insights
5. Discussion & reflection
1. Introduction:
What is this project about?

- Curriculum development at a university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)
- New Bachelor of Industrial Design (ID) Program at a women’s-only College of Design at a Saudi university
- Program of five years
  - The first year’s curriculum is generic for all students in the departments of Graphic Design, Interior Design and the proposed new Industrial Design
  - The curriculum for years 2-5 is program specific
What is this project about? cont.

• Our team wrote the curriculum for the ID specific program
  - Team consisted of experts in ID, curriculum design, languages and cultures, higher education
• Ongoing dialogue and co-design with our partners in Saudi Arabia during the curriculum development phase, its implementation, and some research projects (for details see Montana-Hoyas, Stracke, Oerlemans, & Darweesh, 2018).
What is this project about? cont.

- Curriculum planning, understood as a conversation (Applebee, 1996) must consider cultural identity, gender roles within strict religious practices, and job opportunities for the female graduates.
- Saudi Arabia has a traditional Islamic culture and strict gender segregation.
What is this study about?

- This study looks at female academics’ perceptions of their practice (= work in progress)
- The women in our study are part of the growing female workforce in Saudi Arabia
2. Theoretical background: Women in education and the workforce in Saudi Arabia

- Restraints and achievements of women in the field of education in Saudi Arabia (Alhareth, Al Dighrir, & Al Alhareth, 2015; Hamdan, 2005)
  - Today, women in Saudi Arabia are actively seeking higher education as part of the country’s social, economic and cultural development
  - Women’s education has witnessed an unprecedented development in the past 60 years and is “highly valued in Saudi society” today (Hamdan 2005).
  - With more than 300 women-only colleges, in 2010 female students represented about 56.6% of total university students in the Kingdom (Ministry of Higher Education 2010, 9)
Women in education and the workforce in Saudi Arabia (cont.)

• Although the number of female students in higher education has increased so dramatically since 1930, the ratio of Saudi women in the work force does not reflect this increase
• Currently, women represent 22% of the workforce, while the suggested target for 2030 is 30%
Rationale for this study

• The design and implementation of a women’s only ID curriculum for higher education aimed to make a contribution to the current developments in the KSA, in an area primarily seen as a male domain

• To the best of our knowledge, there has been no empirical research that includes female academics in the KSA, an under-researched community of academics, and investigates their voices and lived experience

• To the best of our knowledge, there is also no knowledge about the scholarly formation of this under-researched community of academics
3. The study

- Exploratory qualitative study
- We conducted semi-structured interviews with teaching and program staff at the College of Design at the Saudi partner university (one-to-one or in pairs)
3. The study

- Sample is diverse in terms of age, position, teaching experience, citizenship, cultural and language background
  - Interviews varied in length and depth
- We transcribed the data *verbatim*
- We analysed the complete data set through thematic data analysis, looking at the participants’ perspectives as a group

Our research interest:

*What is it to be a female academic in the KSA* (Quigley, 2011)?
4. First insights

Five salient and diverse themes:

• Teaching in a gender segregated society
• Translanguaging in the classroom
• Taking charge
• Settling in
• Looking into the future
Teaching in a gender segregated society

Young team & staffing issues
• “The problem was who would teach it ... it wasn’t only anyone, we need to have a female ... Of course we're not saying that we're not going to teach the course because of that. We’re trying to work our way around it to find some solutions until we get someone who is expert enough” (PS1, P-23:30, 39;P-25:11-14)

Working around segregation constraints
• “the thing is we make sure that the interior exercise [of measuring people] is going to be females” (TS3, P-7, 7-8)
• “so I limit to the female ... That’s my ... How I’m working around that, yes ... That’s why it’s hard for me. I cannot push them to find this subject men and women’s, no. I have to understand their context was – or this is their capability.” (TS7, P-6, 11-45)
• “Well, ... this [gender segregation] is something that always is a concern, but has never like stopped any – a new proposal to come out. You know, the – yes, there are some difficulties, but things are like moving and changing really quickly. I know that, for example, some offices – some of the interior design offices or architecture offices require their staff to be segregated ... But they actually find, you know, they have work around it being that or actually it structures their work in a better way to say that, “Okay. We will work separately, but we will have to have this and this and this meetings to meet,” and obviously the meeting was – is, you know, merge – segregation, but – and then – so it is – I see this as a potential sometimes. It’s like, “Okay. It’s better to be” – sometimes, not always, you know, to have this, you know, space and time for yourself, like, to – you just focus on your work... : And then you - of course this doesn’t apply to everything ... But, you know, we’ll try to see the positives.” (TS6, P-18,11-36)
Teaching in a gender segregated society cont.

Perceptions of gender differences vary:

From no difference:

• “I think for my side, there is no difference between male and female. Okay. The difference is the way that you deliver our context, either you understand or not – is it you really (indistinct) you know about what we give you, the tasks or not, because in Malaysia, of course, we mix when we teach our students female and male. So it’s really challenging between them, but in here we just focus on the female. So for me it’s easy to handle it.” (TS7, P-11, 11-17)

To specific differences:

• “females tend to be more detailed in their description ... So I feel the same connection because we are all female” (TS1, P-16, 26-27, 40)

• Well, females I think ... are more – have more excitement and ethics and they follow the rules exactly by the rules ... you will find that females are more excellent and elite than male students in general progress. So even like if you want to join the University ..., you must have – as a female you must have very high grades to be accepted, where a male will get just the average and he’ll get to an architect school. So that’s the difference. ... the girls are more hard working and they’re more serious than the boys (TS3, P-10, 19-26), 40-41)
Translanguaging in the classroom

Working around language constraints

• “I don’t have excellent English, and so do they, and so we actually have the same kind of struggle, something like this. So what I do in class is I will always have one translator ... So sometimes it's students, sometimes it's my TA. So let's say if I taught a new concept or new terminologies, this TA or this student in English, they will explain in Arabic because sometimes you need deeper ... understanding” (TS1, P-13, 34-36; P-14, 4-6)

• ” Well, the good thing we have Malaysian instructors – and they don’t speak Arabic – so when we try to just push our students to go into English, even if they were not very comfortable with it. I mean by comfortable, not confident (TS3, P-17, 12-15) “So we have translators in the middle just to make it more simpler and more easy for them to understand” (TS3, P-17, 12-15, 31-32)
Taking charge

Improvising
• “we need time to understand and need to apply here because the context is different” (TS7, P-15, 34-35) ...

Self-training & development
• “Okay, so I will say course specification overall to me is something new because before as a part-time I always had someone with me to explain all the course, everything” (TS1, P-6,18-20); “when more things we need to decide, things become harder” (TS1, P-7,26); “I improvise from a lot of this” (TS1,P-9,4-5); “I develop maybe myself” (TS1, P-9, 19); “Right now also with the students I need to grow with them” (TS1, P-17,41)
• “Unfortunately, I don’t have any experience in terms of (indistinct) and programing, et cetera, so I’m trying to learn this semester to try and get that and teach that” (TS3, P-5, 6-8)
• ““Okay. This is what we are required to do, but how we will do it is what’s our responsibility to manage ... past experience, either as teaching in other fields or as being taught during the master... And also I think contact with just other teachers (TS5, P4, 29-30; P-5,11-17)
Settling in

Improvements and changes

• “Sometimes from one year to another, we have to change based on the behaviour of the student and their understanding” (TS5, P-9, 1-2).

• “what do we think that we could enhance in terms of the next semester or the next year ... we do think always about improvements” (TS2, P-14, 3-8)

• Because after one year, I as – I in charge for the one batch, third-year student. I realised that after I understand all the course and the program, for the second year that now I am in charge, I feel like more comfortable and more easy to handle it, based on what the requirement on the specification and then all the program (TS7, P-16, 22-26)

• “ Well, unfortunately, I’ve never had a chance to create a content ...But from what I see, I think it’s an ongoing process because content – we need to test the content within that context. We need to see how the students would react to that (TS3, P-8, 30-37)

Seeing teaching as universal

• “students are the same everywhere (TS1, P-15, 22-23); “before we came I feel like you're going to be different, things like this. So it turned out that it's all the same...It's all the same, it's all the same, so meaning it's just language, some psychological background. Other than that, students are still students” (TS1, P-19, 43-44-P - P20-3-5)
Looking into the future

From pessimism
• “Well, I think that just starting to have the courses in here and to graduate different students and then one day go to the field, well, I’m not actually - I can’t tell you what are the opportunities ... because there aren’t a lot” (TS2, P-14, 33-35, 39)
• I think that the major thing that actually I’m looking forward to is that when - we only have a base in the market because what we miss now is that we have the department here, but we don’t really know what’s happening outside. We try to find connections with companies and so on ... we’re struggling to know what’s happening outside (TS5, P-16, 44-45 – P-17, 1-8)

via individual choice
• “So they work – and for sure, when they work at companies, the work is not restricted, like this is a female area, this is a male area. So actually in the application it’s open and it’s up to the student if she prefers to work in this environment or another one. Also, because you know when you’re an industrial designer, you can be a person who work in the office behind a screen or the person who goes to the manufacturer. So it’s again up to the style that you prefer to work with.” (TS5, P-19, 6-12)

To an optimistic vision that transcends local and gender constraints
• “Like now with the new – with our new vision ... I don’t know if you noticed, that we are much more apt to having ... And I think you will see more changes as we go on ... Yeah, it’s going to be more co-educational probably (PS4, P-11, 22-41; P-12, 1)
• “And now we have 27 in three years and a lot of students actually want to join. That gives actually an indication that, you know, the design field is growing in Saudi, that we are – and I hope that we are, you know, exposing the work of our students or giving them what exposure to, you know – to spread what they know” (TS6, P-17, 35-39) I see them working in different domains (TS6, P-18, 5)
• “I think it will be good here because I think industrial design is like a good courses from here to Saudi Arabia and it will be empowering, especially female, because it is focused on the female and then after five years, it will grow up and it will be like spread of the industrial design area here” (TS7, P-14, 25-29)
• “but leave out the local. It can be cultural sensitivity worldwide” (PS4, P-17, 14-15).
5. Discussion & reflection

What is it to be a female academic in the KSA for the participant in this study?

- They are challenged (gender, culture, and language *constraints*)
- They are creative (women ‘work around’ issues)
- Some feel empowered (to spread the design field)

Next steps:

• Intend to request follow-up interviews with the eight participants
  - Development over time
  - More depth
Reflection

• Three instances of our learning that have complemented the actual task of ID curriculum development:
  - Strict gender segregation in the Saudi context turned out to be less of an obstacle in the development phase of the curriculum but plays major role in current implementation
  - multidisciplinarity and cross-cultural awareness helped the Australian team to complete the task to the satisfaction of the Saudi partner
  - focus on cultural identity was needed to allow staff and students to better understand and apply their training in native communities, as opposed to mainstream communities and institutions

  -> all contributing to our own academic formation
Thank you for listening!