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How has King Abdullah Scholarship Program Enhanced the Leadership Skills of Saudi Female Beneficiaries?

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How has King Abdullah Scholarship Program Enhanced the Leadership Skills of Saudi Female

Beneficiaries?

by

Magied Alsqoor

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

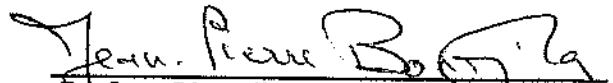
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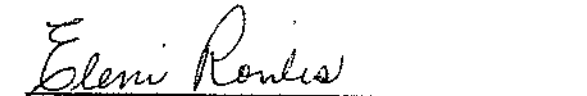
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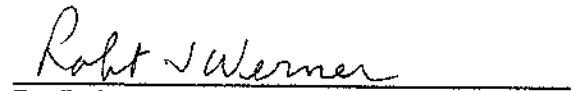
How has King Abdullah Scholarship Program Enhanced the Leadership Skills of Saudi Female
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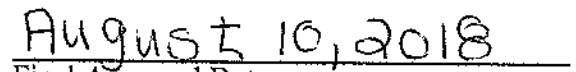
We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality.
We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions
required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee


Dr. Jean-Pierre Bongila, Committee Chair


Dr. Eleni Roulis, Committee Member


Dr. Robert Werner, Committee Member


Final Approval Date

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to learn how King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) enhanced Saudi female students' leadership skills while they were in the U.S. and after they returned home upon graduation. To gather data relevant to this study, I interviewed twelve Saudi female graduates from King Abdullah Scholarship Program and three male chaperones who lived with them in the U.S. I derived three themes from the Saudi females' experiences in the U.S.: Saudi females' pre-KASP leadership experiences, perceptions of leadership in the U.S., and family members as support resources. I also derived three themes relative to KASPs effects on Saudi women's post-graduate lives: personal growth, changes in the participants' professional and personal lives, and the participants' vision of female leadership in Saudi Arabia. I used grounded theory as the overarching theory (Charmaz, 2006) to shed light on the findings; the study also employed three theoretical frameworks: Al Lily' (2011) culture theory, Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) empowerment theory, and Northouse (2013) transformational leadership theory. The most important finding was that KASP has changed the educational, cultural, and leadership landscapes of the Saudi females who benefited from it. I made recommendations in three areas: for the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia, and for current, and newly-admitted Saudi female student beneficiaries of KASP. Future studies could investigate how KASP affects Saudi families' economy and financial status when their sons and daughters graduate from the program and return home.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Female Education, Saudi females, Saudi Arabia scholarship

DEDICATION

First and foremost, this dissertation is dedicated to Allah and to his messenger Mohammed, peace be upon him. I dedicated this research to my beloved parents: Saeed Saleh Alsagoor and Hamdah Mane Al Hutailah, as they went above and beyond what could be imagined in order to help me achieve my educational dream. I am eternally grateful for their unconditional support and love.

I dedicate this dissertation to my soul mate and wife, Manal Khaled Musalam; thank you for sharing this journey with me. You have been a constant source of support, understanding, passion, and encouragement during the challenges throughout my doctoral experience. I am truly thankful for having you in my life.

This work is also dedicated to my American mother, Lois Hokanson, for her continuous support and for teaching me to work hard for the things I aspire to achieve.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND TRIBUTE

Special acknowledgement and thanks for Fr. Jean-Pierre Bongila, my dissertation chair, for having good faith in me. I am grateful for his guidance through the process of completing this dissertation. I am so delightful to have the opportunity to work with a chair who is very well organized and a great problem solver like Fr. Bongila. I am forever indebted to him for his patience and support.

I would also like to thank my dissertation committee members, Dr. Eleni Roulis and Dr. Robert Werner, for their contributions to this work, and devotion of their valuable time and effort to elevate the quality of this dissertation. I am fortunate to have such a great group of educators on my committee.

I would like to recognize and thank all the fifteen research participants who served in this study. I would not be who am I today without their invaluable knowledge and great experiences. Thank you for all of them, and for generously offering their precious time to this research.

To my father, Saeed Alsagoor, and my mother, Hamdah Al Hutailah, and to all my friends and family members who included me in their prayers and supported me during my doctoral experience, I thank you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2016) maintains there is a lingering gender gap in youth literacy rate worldwide, even though the gap has been shrinking year after year in some countries and cultures. The gender gap shrunk by 41.5% from 2005-2010. However, 92 percent of males were literate compared to 87 percent of females (World Bank, 2016). Gender appears to be affecting the advancement of women in a detrimental fashion. In most cultures, men and women are allocated different roles in society due to their gender (Eagly & Carli, 2003). There are assumptions worldwide, and in Saudi Arabia in particular, that women lack proper education and work experience. Such preconceptions have been proven wrong in countries like the United Arab Emirates and Oman (Kemp & Madsen, 2014).

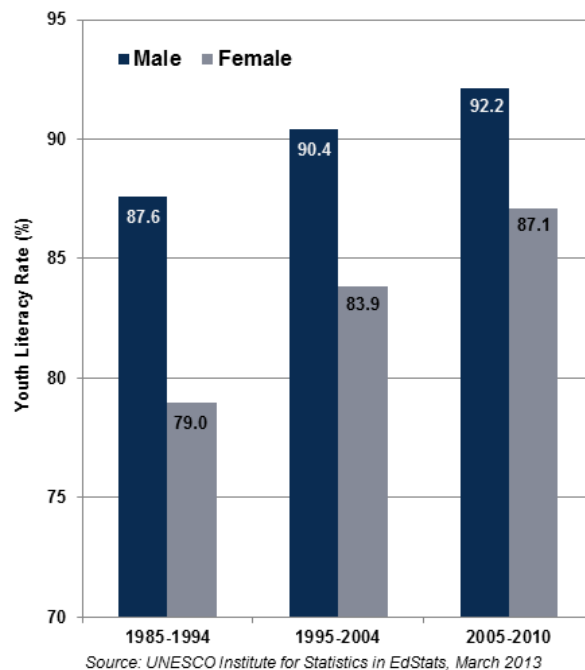


Figure 1.1 World gender gap.

In fact, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has provided equal education to women. Education is a key driver of social change generally and for women. In turn, educated women transform their families' lives. The UAE has a 91 percent literacy rate among females (Kemp et al., 2013). Education for women receives the full support from the highest level of the Emirati government. Top leaders need women to gain qualifications through education, which will lead to positions of influence (Kemp et al., 2013). In Oman, education helped women occupy many middle and upper-level positions in various sectors (Kemp & Madsen, 2014). According to Kemp and Madsen (2014), many Omani females believe firmly that their academic qualifications facilitate promotions at work.

As opposed to the UAE and Oman, Saudi Arabia's overall literacy rate—the lowest rate in Arabian Gulf nations—is about 62 percent. Female literacy stands at approximately 50%, and male literacy at 72% in 2005 (Hamdan, 2005). In 2013, according to the United Nation Children's Fund, the adult literacy rate in Saudi Arabia reached 87.2% (UNICEF, 2016). According to AlMunajjed (2010), the few female participants in the Saudi workforce are a direct result of women's education, which the King Abdullah Scholarship has spearheaded.

The King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) started in 2005, when the former king of Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah, and American president George W. Bush agreed to increase the number of Saudi students (male and female) in the United States. King Abdullah created this program to facilitate the kingdom's sustainable development of human resources (Saudi Ministry of Education, 2018). Limited job opportunities for the kingdom's high number of youth was another rationale for KASP (Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015). Despite its recent launch, KASP is the largest scholarship program in the history of Saudi Arabia. According to the Saudi Ministry

of Higher Education (2018), the KASP vision is to prepare future generations for a knowledge-based society built upon a knowledge-based economy.

The KASP mission statement emphasizes the effective preparation and qualification of Saudi human resources for competition in the global arena (Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015). Hilal, Scott, & Maadad (2015) noted that 82% of the program's participants surveyed believed that their foreign education and qualifications would result in higher positions or salaries when they returned to Saudi Arabia.

According to the Ministry of Higher Education (2018), KASPs primary goals include: sponsor qualified Saudis for study in the world's best universities; set high academic and professional standards; exchange scientific, educational, and cultural experience with countries worldwide; grow the qualified and professional Saudi workforce; and raise and develop the level of professionalism among Saudis.

In creating KASP, King Abdullah intended to provide the kingdom's universities, public, and private sectors with highly-educated leaders with the benefit of a world-class education. The program plays a major role in the development and preparation of human capital and is designed for both male and female graduates to compete successfully in the labor market and scientific research fields (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 2018). Saudi Arabians—male and female—have indiscriminately had a positive view of the scholarship, given its ability to generate more educated and skilled citizens (Hilal, Scott & Maadad, 2015).

The program first sent a group of male and female students to study in the United States in 2005. It then broadened its scope to include a number of other developed countries whereby qualified Saudi Arabian students would get education in various fields of study. KASP chose those countries on the basis of the excellence of their educational systems and academic

programs (SACM, 2018). KASP allowed Saudi students to further their education in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Japan, France, China, South Korea, Australia, Germany, Spain, Canada, and many other countries. Students pursue undergraduate and graduate education in many academic disciplines such as medicine, pharmacy, nursing, engineering, computer sciences, pure sciences, and other disciplines (Denman & Hilal, 2011).

Personal Motivation

I grew up in Saudi Arabia without realizing that gender inequality prevented women from reaching fulfillment and prosperity. Saudi social inequality has certainly had a lasting effect on Saudi women, and it has prevented many women from participating in developing their country (Hamdan, 2005). One case in point is the fact that my mother—whose father prevented her from obtaining a formal education—remains illiterate. My oldest sister stopped going to school when some Saudi families in our town were limited to six years of education.

I pondered why Saudi men could enjoy freedom, including the freedom to be literate and to achieve any educational level, while it was normally acceptable for women not to be able to contribute on equal footing. In engaging in this research, I investigated how King Abdullah's scholarship program (KASP) made a difference in Saudi females' lives by allowing them to become educated leaders during their time abroad and in their post-graduate lives in Saudi Arabia.

I have experienced firsthand KASPs transformative effect on my own life, as well as that of my family. I have experienced leadership theories, skills and practices in the course of my scholarship in the United States, but like the majority of Saudis, I am a man, and unfairly endowed with privileges some consider innate. This program has also allowed me to ponder if Saudi females are benefiting from KASP and taking advantage of such opportunity to enhance

leadership skills and become future leaders. I have been fascinated by how KASP has extended to women those educational opportunities historically reserved for Saudi men.

I used my exposure to the scholarship program and experience of studying leadership styles at the University of Saint Thomas to dig deeper in the issue, including studying how Saudi females leverage leadership notions they acquired in the U.S. as a consequence of their selection to the King Abdullah's scholarship and upon their return to Saudi Arabia. In fact, few women were exposed to such notions as the strengths, skills, and personality traits, as well as the various roles leaders play (Northouse, 2013). I drew upon my scholarly experience to thoroughly investigate how many Saudi lack freedom, at least as far as education and leadership are concerned.

According to some research participants, Saudi female students' lifestyles transformed during their U.S. education. There, they fought homesickness, loneliness, responsibility, and the processes of adjusting to a new culture, learning a new language, and studying in a new educational environment. Participants shared many informative stories and lived experiences as rich data for my research. These stories provide a road map to newly-admitted and future KASP students. My findings from this research may help the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia change scholarship policies and practices.

Northouse (2013) defined leadership as "a process" in which a person "influences a group" in order to "achieve a common goal" (p. 5). Studying leadership for more than seven years in the United States motivated me to study its impact on the Saudi society. I dedicate this research and its results to all Saudi females who seek to improve their educational levels, social conditions, family lives, and their communities. Finally, I chose this topic due to my utmost

support of gender equality in shared-leadership in Saudi Arabia—a support that makes me determined to always fight for this cause.

Guided by my academic advisor, I realized it would be useful for students in future Saudi generations to understand KASPs effects on Saudi female students during their education in the U.S. and in their post-graduate lives. As a researcher, it was a profound experience listening research participants' stories and lived experiences. Overall, the KASP experience was a positive turning point in most research participants' lives.

Significance of the Study

Saudi women lack rights that non-Saudi people take for granted, such as the right to an education. The unequal treatment of women is one of the most controversial issues about Saudi Arabia. Saudi women must gain a male relative's permission and be accompanied by a male guardian to travel (Sidani, 2005). This research project explored the King Abdullah Scholarship Program's impact on Saudi female participants' leadership skills. When Saudi female students leave their homes, family members, and friends to study abroad, they are looking for better opportunities not only for themselves, but also for their families (Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015). However, it is not clear how KASP has empowered its female beneficiaries. The current study is relevant because it reveals the potential influence of female empowerment this important scholarship program might yield.

This research is important because it focuses on improving female leadership in Saudi Arabia, and knowing the outcomes of KASP may help Saudi females compete with the male leaders in their native country. On a personal note, this research is worth undertaking because KASP has given the opportunity to my sisters and my wife to become national leaders and exemplars of successful women. Since it is important to my country to give women many

opportunities to lead and utilize their talents, it remains to be seen whether KASP has contributed in improving women's conditions in Saudi Arabia.

Male leaders occupy the Saudi labor market and governmental institutions, and Saudi females lack leadership opportunities. Female Saudi leaders face restrictions and obstacles that male leaders do not face (Taleb, 2010). Saudi females are underrepresented in many public and private sector organizations. One of the best solutions to increase Saudi female leadership representation is to invest in educating more Saudi females abroad (Hilal & Dinman, 2013). Therefore, this study participated in understanding how KASP has potentially contributed to increasing female representation to the country's leadership.

Although the Saudi Arabian government provides Saudi females with some education opportunities within the country, it also opens the door for them to study abroad through the KASP. King Abdullah's government (2005-2015) believed that studying abroad might give young Saudis the opportunity to experience new ideas and acquire new behaviors that could enrich the overall Saudi culture. The current Saudi government understands the importance and the risks of this program when it allows young Saudis, particularly females, more access to education, international media, and new technologies (Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to learn about the leadership experiences of female Saudi KASP recipients who studied in the United States and returned to the kingdom after graduation. I learned very much about their leadership experiences of studying in the United States, their participation in empowerment organizations, and how they dealt with difficulties in the American culture. I also learned about their U.S. academic lives, family challenges, and their post-graduate work experiences in Saudi Arabia. My intent was to learn the extent to which the

King Abdullah Scholarship had contributed to the individual, academic, cultural and professional change of the Saudi females who participated in this study.

Research Questions

This study on the importance of KASP addressed the following research questions:

- How has King Abdullah Scholarship Program shaped the lives of Saudi female students who have benefitted from it inside the U.S. and when they returned home?
- How has the education experience outside Saudi Arabia contributed to preparing future female leaders in that country?
- How do participants in this study perceive leadership roles as a result of their education in the United States?

Definition of Terms

I adopted the following terms and definitions for use in this study.

King Abdullah Scholarship Program: A Saudi Arabian government scholarship program for its youth to study abroad to increase their educational and cultural experiences.

Male chaperone (Mahram): A woman's closest male relative (her father, her husband, her brother, her grandfather, or her son). Saudi women are considered to be legal minors (Tonnessen, 2016).

Patriarchal society: A social system that gives full power and authority to men over women in all life aspects. According to Muneer and Mohamed (2003), in a patriarchal society, the husband is the primary decision-maker regarding all household issues.

Family honor: The family reputation every member of the family must demonstrate through their responsible behaviors. An individual family member's mistake harms the entire family's honor; when the family loses honor, they have lost everything (Al Lily, 2011).

Male-Female division: A gender segregation system whereby women are forbidden to mix with strange men, who are not related to them, in public and private places in Saudi Arabia (Al Lily, 2011).

Gender inequality: According to Ridgway (2011), gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment between individuals due to their gender.

Leadership: is the process whereby an individual can influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2013).

Vision 2030: A Saudi Arabia governmental plan to modernize its economy and its society. The plan includes greater integration of young Saudis from both genders into the workforce, largely out of economic necessity (MOE, 2018).

Globalization: Globalization is the reconfiguration of the world-economy for the free movement of goods across all frontiers (Wallerstein, 2004).

Empowerment: Empowerment theory is a construct that links individual abilities and strengths to help systems, and enable proactive behaviors to lead to social change (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of my research dissertation study concerned the role that King Abdullah's scholarship program has played in the lives of women who have benefitted from it. This groundbreaking and innovative scholarship program is worthy of study, particularly with regard to its female beneficiaries, given women's restricted access to education in many Arab countries in general, and Saudi Arabia in particular. I conducted a literature review to identify studies related to the impact of education in female leadership in the Arab world. I accessed the following databases: Academic Premiere, ERIC, Google Scholar, Emerald, and PsycINFO. I reviewed more than seventy-five peer-reviewed journals, articles, and books. The literature review is organized in five sections: (1) female leadership in the Arab world; (2) Saudi Arabian patriarchal hierarchy and male domination; (3) female leadership and its challenges in Saudi Arabia; (4) female education in Saudi Arabia; and (5) King Abdullah's Scholarship and leadership revolution. After introducing my content review, I identified the gaps and tensions found in the literature and the need for further investigation. I then introduced the theoretical framework adopted to interpret my review findings.

Female Leadership in the Arab World

Al-Sheikhly (2012) discovered a definitive lack of female leadership in Arab countries and the Arabian Gulf region. In Qatar and Oman alone, men outnumber women 2:1, and therefore reduce female leadership in those two countries. Saudi Arabia depends on a substantial foreign male workforce because the kingdom's laws restrict women's employment (Madsen, Kemp, & Davis, 2014). According to Kirdar et al. (2007), Arab women are using their educational experience to redefine their identities and aspirations for the future.

Metcalf (2011) stated that there is evidence in the Arabian Gulf region of concentrating women in lower positions, even when those women have been with the same organization for an extended period of time. According to Madsen et al. (2014), researchers were not surprised to see the data of their research proving that there are fewer women than men in management positions in companies within the six countries in the Arabian Gulf region which are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman. The unemployment rate among Saudi citizens from both genders is 12.8% (Ministry of Education, 2018).

According to Alomair (2015), women in Saudi Arabia need more opportunities to help build the country. They suffer from different issues in Saudi Arabia, such as the notion that women should stay at home, they should have a male guardian whenever they leave the country, and women are not given the opportunity to participate in the labor market, and not given the basic rights such as marriage, drive a car, or obtain a passport without the approval of a male relative. All of these reasons have increased the female unemployment rate in Saudi Arabia (Alomair, 2015). Sidani et al.'s (2015) findings suggested an inability to separate women's potential leadership roles from their role as mothers or wives. They are perceived to be less qualified to become leaders in society. In Saudi Arabia, women are slowly assuming higher positions that include deputy ministers, Shura Council consultants, university presidents, and other new and important positions (Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015).

Deaver (2013) noted that the employment rate among Saudi women is 45%. Saudi women are eager to help their country become one of the well-developed countries in the region. They work very hard to increase their leadership, communication, financial administration, and global skills. Saudi women face multiple obstacles to reach their dreams. The female leadership deficit is a global issue; Lebanon, for example, suffers from the same issue (Sidani et al., 2015).

The participants in Taleb's research study (2010) agreed that without effective communication, it would be impossible for leaders to communicate their vision for the future of Saudi Arabian women and to ensure transparency in the process.

Patriarchal Hierarchy and Male Domination in Saudi Arabia

Males are the guardians of the whole family in Saudi Arabia and in most Arab countries (Alyamani, 1985). The male guardianship in Saudi Arabia is not only directly affecting Saudi women's ability to travel or file a court case without the permission of a male guardian, but also inhibits their ability to report domestic violence or conflicts inside the family to the police (Tonnessen, 2016). According to Taleb (2010), Saudi Arabia is a country that is characterized by being both a conservative and masculine society.

“[In Saudi Arabia] leadership has been shaped mainly by religion, culture, and globalization. Men have been considered to be the ultimate, automatically chosen leaders while women are marginalized” (Rashwan, 2015, p 124). Cooke (2001) says, “There is an increasingly large gap between women who submit to the patriarchal rules of their chosen religious communities and those who reject such rules and norms outright may not be as great as would at first appear” (p. 57). Al-Sheikhly (2012), confirmed that because of the male guardianship system, women in Saudi Arabia are experiencing all forms of separatism not only from men, but also from the rest of the society they live in, and she described the Saudi society as a society dominated by patriarchy.

According to Alyamani (1985), Women in Saudi Arabia find it hard to get leadership opportunities in the Saudi market. Women in Saudi Arabia see the power and control of their fathers in the household, and if they get married this power will ultimately shift to their husbands (Al-Sheikhly, 2012). Al Hazmi and Nyland (2010) found that engaging with the opposite gender

in a mixed gender environment was difficult for Saudi women, and is sometimes associated with some concern and hesitation for both genders which make it one of the main reasons for the lack of female leadership in the country (Al Hazmi & Nyland, 2010).

According to AlMunajjed (1997), many businesswomen in Saudi Arabia face a lot of female challenges in their daily work basis due to the male guardianship system. Even though Saudi women own more than 12% of the firms in Saudi Arabia, including large manufacturing firms, the male guardian is obligatory to direct to any business transactions (AlMunajjed, 1997). Zamberi (2011) in his study noted that, it is hard for Saudi women to be successful in their own countries due to many reasons. First, many social and regularity interactions are more challenging for women because of their gender. Second, women in Saudi Arabia rely heavily on their male relatives to complete the business registration process. Third, businesswomen get extra restrictions and requirements that are not required for businessmen in Saudi Arabia (Zamberi, 2011).

Female Leadership and Women Challenges in Saudi Arabia

As reported by Abdalla (1996), women in Saudi Arabia and other Arabian Gulf countries face many challenges, including the absence of legal frameworks which protect women. Arabian Gulf countries rely primarily on an expatriate male workforce in the absence of plans and strategies to guide women's rights to work. According to Welsh et al. (2014), few Saudi females have confidence in their product innovation, interpersonal, management, and business skills. Alomair (2015) highlighted the importance of developing the capacity and competency of female leaders in Saudi Arabia to minimize gender disparities.

Al-Sheikhly (2012) blamed the lack of female leadership in Saudi Arabia to extremists who thought that educating girls in the country will undermine the foundations of morality and

family life. “Female leadership development (in Saudi Arabia) should be extended to college students that will equip them with the capacity and competencies needed for career advancement” (Alomair, 2015, p 89). There are some reasons that hinder the ability of Saudi females to exercise their leadership role effectively, such as the lack of self-confidence, fear of responsibility, isolation in the administrative positions, and balancing between family obligations and professional responsibilities (Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015).

One of the challenges that confront Saudi women is finding places for them to work alongside men, as that simple fact is a legal violation of the Saudi Arabian prohibition (Doumato, 1999). The sex-segregation rules in Saudi Arabia are still in effect, and all of the blame of underemployment of women can be attributed toward the higher goal of maintaining Islamic values (Doumato, 1999). Alyahya (2005) confirmed that, due to the patriarchal fabric of Saudi society, women still suffer from inequality of opportunity where employment opportunities are limited to a few sectors, such as education and healthcare. Saudi women are completely absent in important areas such as the Saudi Arabian Cabinet and many other higher management positions (Alyahya, 2005). Saudi women are in need of many social entrepreneurship programs to enhance their leadership skills (Kattan, 2015).

Al-Ahmadi (2011) stated that women in Saudi Arabia still face many structural challenges such as limited authority, psychological pressures, and also limited responsibilities given to them by their supervisors. According to Alomair (2015), many Saudi women face many challenges to reach the highest levels of leadership and those challenges include: discouragement over career advancement from co-workers or a family member, personal circumstances, and some invisible rules inside the institutions of the country. Giving Saudi women the opportunity

to lead in different fields will help them become role models for aspiring young girls and shift the society's attitude towards female leadership (Alomair, 2015).

Female Education in Saudi Arabia

In the early 1940s, the Saudi government began sending a few bright, young Saudi men to study abroad (Hamdan, 2005). A bright young woman, Fatina Shakir, applied to the program to get the same opportunity. The Saudi Ministry of Higher Education rejected her application because it was immoral for a Saudi female to study independently outside of the country. Shakir and her father appealed to King Faisal in 1966 and she was awarded the scholarship. Shakir was the first Saudi female to obtain a PhD degree from a U.S. university, in 1971 (Hamdan, 2005). In addition, Saudi Arabia changed its thinking about the importance of education for young citizens after 9/11 because of its alleged association and misconception, with regards to global terrorist acts (Denman & Hilal, 2011).

Saudi King Faisal bin Abdul-Aziz initiated formal female education in 1960. Many protesters were strongly opposed to sending their girls to school (Albalawi, 2013). At that time, many scholars in Saudi Arabia believed that women should not leave their homes, and instead they ought to take care of the house and their family members, even though Islam indicates that that education is a right for women (Albalawi, 2013).

Female education started with many obstacles in Saudi Arabia, but it has been changing year after year. This has led scholars to maintain that the enhancement of women leadership in Saudi Arabia needs the support from the Saudi government (al-Ahmadi, 2011). Female education has increased in Saudi Arabia from 5,200 students in 1960, to more than two million female students by the late 1990s (Calvert & Al-Shetaiwi, 2002). In 2014, the number reached three million Saudi females, who go to school in 13 different regions in the country (MOHE, 2016).

Every country in this world is aware of the importance of educating its citizens. Education today has been confronted by globalization pressures as one of the important investments to any country, and that is a result of more measures in teaching and learning processes from region to region (Hilal & Dinman, 2013). According to Bechtold's (2012) research with young Saudis, female education started late in Saudi Arabia due to many reasons. First, the Saudi society itself prefers boys over girls. Secondly, Saudi boys are privileged, whereas Saudi girls are victims of the society where they are taught not to leave home other than to shop for their family or visit friends.

People in Saudi Arabia still underestimate the ability of women, and the perception of many is that they are half minded (Bechtold, 2012). A lot of religious scholars in Saudi Arabia still believe that educating women will lead to immorality and corrupt thinking (AlMunajjed, 1997). Women are not supposed to appear alone in public, and those norms in the Saudi society clearly restrict the participation of women in education venues and in most leadership positions (Rashwan, 2015).

Most researchers agreed that the Saudi education programs are not good enough to prepare either female or male leaders for the labor force (Al-Ghaith, & Al-Mashoq, 1996; Al-Huseni, 1993; Al-Nimer, 1988, 1989; Ben-Duheash, 1995). The Ministry of Education supported the education of Saudi females and sent talented women abroad to finish their studies in high-demand subjects (Hamdan, 2005). According to Al-Sheikhly (2012), the entire education system in Saudi Arabia does not focus on writing, thinking critically, or new ways of thinking and analyzing issues in the way that the western educational systems do. According to Samergandi (1992), Saudi girls go to colleges in Saudi Arabia mainly for three main reasons: internal

motivation and ambition, a desire to be away parental and social responsibilities, or to maintain their social class and keep up with other girls from the same class.

The Saudi government is working hard to provide Saudi women with educational opportunities because they know what educating woman can do for family, the community, and the whole country (Rashwan, 2015). The Saudi government has worked hard to empower Saudi women. With the largest women's university in the world (Princess Norah University), the government created an important environment to empower Saudi women (Rashwan, 2015). These Saudi government efforts have resulted in growing participation of Saudi women in senior management positions in public and private sectors (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGroven, 2015).

Education should be a priority for every country, and if Saudi women plan to survive this globalized and progressive era, they need to be educated properly (Hamdan, 2005). According to Zamberi (2011), women in Saudi Arabia need to be provided with the following to prepare them for any leadership position in the country:

- Improve the visibility of female role models for female students in high schools and colleges.
- Provide more workshops for Saudi females to improve their knowledge in financing, marketing, technology, and how to access local and international markets.
- Help new female leaders (businesswomen) navigate through government rules and regulations and simplify it to them to encourage more participants.
- Help Saudi females to build networks with other business owners in Saudi Arabia or anywhere else to share ideas and experiences.

King Abdullah Scholarship Program

Since Saudi Arabia could not import the Western-style education into non-Western culture, the government decided to send their young people to the west to get their education (Krieger, 2007). The King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) was initiated in 2005 (Denman & Hilal, 2011). The program's main objective was to support students to acquire the knowledge, tools, and skills needed for future leaders in different fields (Bugis, 2012). The vision of KASP program is to prepare distinguished students for a knowledge-based society, built upon a knowledge-based economic system (Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015).

Al-sheikhly's (2012) findings suggested that Saudi women studying at U.S. universities developed intercultural competence. Al-Sheikhly (2012) added that Saudi women proved to have strong levels of motivation and desire to succeed academically in hopes that they could improve women's status when they returned to their home country. The data collected by Hilal et al. (2015) showed that Saudi students demonstrated levels of self-confidence when pursuing education abroad for their own personal growth, but have expressed doubt as to how studying abroad will benefit them and their families in the future.

The scholarship program is a good opportunity for Saudi students to complete their university studies abroad (Alsayyed, 2007). When those students return, they bring new ideas and experiences that will help the country's prosperity (Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015). According to a study by Al-sheikhly (2012), Saudi females in the U.S. admitted that the decision to leave their life and come to the United States was not an easy decision. It was a hard decision for them to make, but they felt it was a necessary step in order to ensure a brighter future.

In my review of the academic literature, I found very few studies that included Saudi students. Instead, there were several studies regarding international students in general, such as

how they adapted to the English language and to the classroom environment, and how to survive anxiety and homesickness. According to Ransom, Larcombe, & Baik, (2005), Mak (2011), and Chen, Lee, Chen, and Lee (2011), challenges appear for international students during entry and settlement into a new country, and threaten the wellbeing of their studies and adjustment to a new culture.

International students have cultural strengths that may protect them from negative outcomes when they arrive to the United States, but at the same time, they are exposed to stressors such as the inability to find adequate schools, majors, housing, and health insurance, challenges associated with learning a new language and culture, and immigration sentiments and policies. All these difficulties may leave them more vulnerable to other problems, including depression and hopelessness. It is hard for international students to adjust if they are away from their biggest supporters, which are families and friends (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015).

According to Chen (1999), many international students in the U.S. could experience cultural shock and academic stress in their first year. This shock happened after the honeymoon stage of being excited to move to a new place. There are many reasons behind the cultural shock that international students face when they come to study in a new culture such as the language barriers, lack of knowledge of the host culture, and difficulty in adapting to the host country's lifestyle (Chen, 1999). The difficulties in verbal and written communications could leave international students uncomfortable and insecure in their daily life activities (Chen, 1999).

Hechanova-Alampay et al., (1998) and Rajapaska and Dundes (2002) explained how stress, anxiety, and homesickness can affect international students not only academically, but also can affect their social lives and can increase the learning gap between them and domestic

students. According to Andrade (2012), in order for those international students to gain self-confidence and make them feel safe, every school needs to establish a welcoming environment from the classroom, to the teachers, and the whole school faculty. By doing such an act, international students will improve academically and encourage them to put forth more efforts, which will result into increasing their learning opportunities and make them great leaders for a better tomorrow (Stewart, 2010).

Kampman (2011) suggested that there is a need for transparent and honest communication between international student offices in the American universities and the international students. Saudi female students go through a lot to adjust to their new American community, such as cultural adjustment and cultural differences between Saudi Arabia and the United States, proficiency in English, social support, more freedom, and decision-making opportunities (Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGroven, 2015).

According to the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (2011), the number of Saudi students who benefitted from KASP and studying in the U.S. amounted to 48,000. In 2014, that number rose to 185,000 KASP recipients in all 24 countries around the world 22% of them are females (MOE, 2015). Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGroven (2015), noted that there are more than 17,000 Saudi females in the United States alone. In a recent study, the number of Saudi students who benefitted from KASP and studying in the U.S. reached 87786 students from both genders. It is worth noting that, Saudi female student constituted 33% of this population where there are more than 29125 female students on scholarship in the U.S. (SACM, 2018).

Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, I summarize the four theoretical approaches I believe relate to female leadership in Saudi Arabia. The four theoretical approaches that I found include culture theory,

gender theory, Maxine Greene's theory of Freedom, and transformational leadership theory (Al Lily, 2011; Ridgeway, 2011; Alhazmi, 2010; Metcalfe, 2011; Greene, 1988; Alomair, 2015; Taleb, 2010; Northouse, 2013).

Culture Theory

Clifford Geertz (1973) defined culture as “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (p.89). Al Lily (2011) introduced the culture theory of Saudi Arabia by breaking it into five subthemes or practices that embody the Saudi culture: family honor, male-female divisions, veiling, male guardianship, and public-private division. According to Al Lily (2011), the Saudi Arabian culture is a complex mixture between traditional norms and Islamic values. Saudis tend to ensure that any reform or change in their country remains within acceptable boundaries. Change is happening in the Saudi society, but it is a slow-moving process (Al Lily, 2011).

Family honor. Family honor is very important in the Saudi culture. It is based on the behaviors of the Saudi community members. Losing honor inside the Saudi community means losing everything. Any impropriety committed by Saudi females may provoke an attack on her morality, and her entire family might suffer (Al Lily, 2011). All of this fear associated with female dishonor has led to the isolation of Saudi females. It has prevented some Saudi females from obtaining identification cards or personal photos because they do not want their faces to be seen by the entire community.

Male-female divisions. Women are forbidden to mix with men in the Saudi culture unless they are close relatives. This system of gender separation occurs in all aspects of private and public life in Saudi Arabia, including schools where females have their own campuses (Al Lily,

2011). If any Saudi female is in need of communication with a man, she is expected to keep communication to a minimum, lower her voice, and avoid eye contact with the man.

Veiling. Veiling or hijab is a piece of cloth that covers the hair of a female. Niqab is the piece of cloth that covers the whole face. Saudi females lately have started to get rid of the niqab and just wear the hijab if they leave the house or sit with strangers (Al Lily, 2011). Saudi females are not allowed to leave the house without being accompanied by a male household servant, (Al Lily, 2011).

Male guardianship. Men are responsible for the well-being of women in Saudi Arabia by law and customs. Many daily activities of Saudi women require permission from their male guardians including having a job, attending universities, or traveling inside and outside Saudi Arabia (Al Lily, 2011). All these practices treat adult women like minors and make some women angry and push for change (Al Lily, 2011).

Public-private division. Saudi females are facing the Saudi division of public and private worlds, where men are responsible for outdoor activities and the women are responsible for indoor activities, such as taking care of the house, family, and grocery shopping, for example (Al Lily, 2011). Saudi Arabia is known as the most restrictive Arab society when it comes to women's mobility and their public activity (Al Lily, 2011). Saudi men are well known for providing protection for females, and making sure women are always accompanied when leaving home and walking in the streets (Al Lily, 2011).

Gender Theory

Wharton (2009) defined gender in American society as a status characteristic where men in general are regarded more positively than women. When sex as a category and characteristic has its own value, it begins to shape expectations and form basis for stereotypes (Wharton,

2009). According to Wood and Eagly (2009), gender identity refers to how the person perceives himself/herself either to be masculine or feminine in a given society. Women and men have different interests and behaviors and they relate differently inside their society (Wood & Eagly, 2009).

According to Jenssen (2010), gender theory was the main focus of Jean Baudrillard in his articles and researches. Baudrillard detected deep problems at the heart of gender theory such as male theory and masculinity (Jenssen, 2010). He became one of the early French feminists (Jenssen, 2010). Baudrillard explained gender theory as a study devoted to gender identity, which include men and women studies. He also investigated to what extent gender issues affect the society (Jenssen, 2010).

Gender privilege. In their research, Eagly and Carli (2003) introduced the gender advantage model. This model is geared towards women because they are becoming more educated, and their accomplishments are changing societal roles, leadership roles, and organizational practices. Despite these accomplishments, all of these advantages are not helping where women still suffer unwelcoming and unappreciative context of their leadership potential in Saudi Arabia (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Gender inequality. Ridgeway (2011) examined how gender inequality occurs at the interpersonal levels of cultural analysis. Gender is a way to sustain and establish relationships with others. It is a primary cultural frame everywhere. Women and men are being taught the same skills to lead, but men are considered more fit and capable as leaders, where women are less likely to emerge as leaders in mixed-sex workplaces, societies and communities (Ridgeway, 2011).

Gender separation. AlMunajjed (1997) explained the gender separation in Saudi Arabia, and how it comes from basic Islamic teaching, according to some Wahhabist scholars. Those scholars enforce gender separation to protect women from sexual assaults and any harms including adultery. Alhazmi (2010) proved in his research that Saudi international students find some difficulties adjusting to a mixed gender environment. Saudi females preferred to isolate themselves rather than engaging with their classmates, particularly males (Alhazmi, 2010).

Some International Saudi males in Australia are sometimes concerned and hesitant to engage with the opposite gender in a mixed gender environment. All of these concerns and hesitations are a result of the restrictions and limitations of talking to females by the culture of gender segregation in Saudi Arabia. These concerns are high among new Saudi student arrivals, but overtime they get used to it (Alhazmi, 2010).

The value of gender lens in the Middle East is very important. Many studies talked about how gender planning should be central to national strategy and policy evaluation in many countries including Saudi Arabia. Gender in these countries is shaped by social and cultural variables. Analyzing this theory will lead to a better understanding of the gender dimensions that can assist women's empowerment and development (Metcalf, 2011).

Maxine Greene's Theory of Freedom

Maxine Greene (1988) defined the root of freedom as the power of possible and seeing the world from different perspectives. Freedom to Greene is only attained in the social context and can be provided by helping individuals experience empathy to others (Greene, 1988). According to Greene (1988), freedom of mind always comes with freedom of action and they both create valued community and responsible societal members. Freedom can be achieved

within an ongoing transaction by identifying the obstacles and coming together to defeat common obstacles (Greene, 1988).

Freedom and the individual's responsibility. There are always obstacles on any leader's path to success. The first step to move beyond any obstacle is identifying potential obstacles.

Greene (1988) explained how identifying and defeating obstacles could lead to good results:

[People] do not reach out for fulfillment if they do not feel impeded somehow, and if they are not enabled to name the obstacles that stand in their way. At once, the very existence of obstacles depends on the desire to reach toward wider spaces for fulfillment, to expand options, to know alternatives. As has been said, a rock is an obstacle only to the one who wants to climb the hill (p. 5).

Looking at things from a different perspective is always helpful. When you look at things from a different point of view, you obtain the power to act differently. This kind of thinking will help to change the world and give leaders the opportunity to share the realized benefits with other people, and will give the leaders the ability to make significant change (Greene, 1988). Education is a very important element of the development of every country.

Role of education. Education can enhance people's knowledge about their culture and their ancestor's brave history. In the meantime, that education needs to take its people to the next level and teach them about other cultures around the world. Proper education always recognizes the effort to achieve a common good, which builds strong societies that respects one another (Greene, 1988). Greene tried many times to prove the importance of social and educational vision in the development of successful societies.

What Maxine Greene thinks about our educational vision currently is true. Many countries are not making progress in developing their educational sector. Teachers need to

implement the education philosophies more into the classroom. The upcoming generations will ask what their countries have done to fix the gap in education. Any change is difficult, but recognizing the problem will create more ideas and will bring more solutions to the surface. Rethinking Saudi Arabia's educational priorities and focusing on a specific strategy will lead to the common good in our communities.

Greene (1988) argued that teachers have profound influence on students, and they can empower the students to move ahead and be a beneficial asset to their society. On the other hand, teachers can disempower the students and create a disadvantage for their talents and abilities if the teachers used the wrong strategies. Teachers can help students by teaching them how to question things and how to work hard to think freely. This is not an easy task for teachers; they need help from the school, families, and from the students themselves. Teachers cannot make a difference with an individual effort; it needs to be a collective effort (Greene, 1988).

Recognizing the problems, listening to variety of perspectives, and the ability to develop the education sector are important elements to create a wakeup call and get things done. Greene (1988) has a different meaning of education, and its role in developing the society:

It is through and by means of education, many of us believe, that individuals can be provoked to reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space. It is through and by means of education that they may become empowered to think about what they are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of their lived worlds. (p. 12)

Does having the study abroad opportunity provided for Saudi female students with the freedom to choose their future path create the optimum outcome for future leaders in Saudi Arabia? Do teachers and university staff in the U.S. effectively challenge Saudi female students

to work more and prove themselves in leadership roles? How is providing the freedom to freely pursue education in the U.S. helping Saudi females to achieve more back home? All of these questions will provide a future need for further research. The focus of the study and freedom theory will help to determine, analyze, and enrich the data and research.

Transformational Leadership Theory

James MacGregor Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as a collaboration process between leaders and followers to advance to a higher level. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership creates significant change in the life of people, organizations, and communities. It can change expectations, set a clear vision, and inspire a lot of people. Transformational leaders can not only change the organizational culture, but also make a change through example (Burns, 1978).

According to Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009), transformational leadership positively relates to individuals' creativity. It also leads to increased motivation in the work environment, innovations, and psychological empowerment. At the organizational level, transformational leadership can influence innovations and enhance employee thinking and productivity.

Transformative theory is not only about the transforming of lives and having great outcomes, but also advocating action to help individuals (Creswell, 2012). According to Creswell (2012), the basic tenet of this theory is that knowledge can help people improve societies, and can reflect the power and social relationships within a particular society. Researchers prefer this theory when participants voice their opinions throughout the research process, and are willing to take actions to transform their lives and their communities (Creswell, 2012). Scholars often identify the major tenets of transformational leadership theory in terms of inspirational motivation, role modeling, and individual consideration.

Inspirational motivation. Alomair (2015) found that Saudi females are gradually being empowered to participate fully in their nation's modernization. According to Alomair (2015), in order to develop effective Saudi female leadership, the task requires the teaching and the implementation of a transformational leadership framework. Taleb's (2010) study shows how female teachers in Saudi Arabia tend to prefer the transformational leadership style because of its emphasis on vision and the development of the individual person.

Role modeling. This specific theoretical lens could be used to contribute new knowledge for Saudi female leadership. The transformational leader influences based on emotions, and assesses the follower's motives (Northouse, 2013). Having the ability to adapt to other leadership styles and motives is essential in understanding what the followers want and, in turn, how to get what one wants as a leader (Northouse, 2013).

Individual consideration. Leaders who are seen as transformational have a strong set of internal values and motives. They can effectively influence others to contribute to the group rather than just to the individual's interests (Northouse, 2013). A transformational leader needs to have certain attributes such as personality, inspiration, and the ability to motivate and consider the individual's needs (Northouse, 2013).

Empowerment Theory

Empowerment theory is a construct that links individual abilities and strengths to help systems and enable proactive behaviors to lead to social change (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Creating responsive communities and removing hurdles led to this theory (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). According to Perkins and Zimmerman (1995), researchers realized the increased use of the word "empower" in many researches from 1974-1986. Since then, the empowerment theory recognition increased greatly day by day. Empowerment might include

empowering individuals, organizations, or communities, and it is all about identifying capabilities and reaching greater outcomes and results (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Empowerment outcomes. Empowerment outcomes for individuals can involve the participation of community organization and helping that organization reach the next level. The outcomes for the organization might include shared leadership and collective decision making. In addition, the outcomes at the community level might include actions to access community resources and government offices. Empowerment is about achieving goals, gaining access to resources, and understanding the basic components of the construct (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Researchers and practitioners use empowerment theory because it embodies strength-based resolve, can define community conditions, and can be used as a solution to the problems that the community regularly faces (Baxamusa, 2008; Ozer et al., 2013; Parti and Zani, 2013; Zippay, 1995). Christens (2012) and Hunter et al. (2013) agreed that empowerment represents a largely untested theory. They noted that few quantitative instruments have been validated to measure empowerment among different populations. Empowerment is always struggling to create a responsive community. It should always drive us to think of wellness versus illness, and strengths versus weaknesses (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Empowerment as a tool. Saudi female students suffer in Saudi Arabia from the male dominated society when they graduate from colleges and universities. Saudi males control the administration management all over the country in the public and private sectors. Having this kind of complete control and power will lead to a hindrance and stumbling point in Saudi Arabia. According to Foucault (1977), people and groups wield power as an act of domination. Foucault's theory will add more knowledge to the research by showing if the KASP will help

shift the power to the female sections and provide them with the opportunity to lead rather than being followers. “Empowerment is an active, participatory process through which individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives, acquire rights, and reduce marginalization” (Peterson, p.96, 2014).

The idea of Foucault’s theory is that the empowerment concept must come from the people who suffer rather than those in power. Empowerment can lead to social change and economic justice in any culture (Peterson, 2014). With more involvement and voices of the Saudi females and other female leaders, once they are aware of the discrepancy of their expectations and their reality, females in Saudi Arabia will demand justice. Without the transparency of information for female leadership in Saudi Arabia, the current viewpoint is perpetuated and the people there see no reason to rise up and fight for their rights. This research will analyze the data based on the power lens, and whether the KASP raises or decreases women’s empowerment.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This research methodology for this study was qualitative, for these reasons: a) determine how the King Abdullah Scholarship Program impacts Saudi female students and their leadership skills, b) explore the consequences of studying abroad and the importance of this opportunity to prepare female future leaders in Saudi Arabia, c) finally, to discover how my participants defined leadership in relation to their goals and aspirations they have acquired during their study in the U.S.

“We conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored. Exploration is needed to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices” (Creswell, p.47, 2012). It also allows the researcher to gain better insight by interviewing people who are related to the issue and not only relying on what they read in existing literature. Qualitative research is important because it empowers individuals to share their stories, and values the interactions among people (Creswell, 2012).

Qualitative research helped me understand the perceptions of Saudi women as far as the effects of the KASP they received were concerned. Qualitative research focuses on the quality of things more than their quantity (Bazeley, 2013), and it helps researchers understand the background of the issue because it requires dedicated time gathering data and facts. Likewise, this study shed a light on the potential empowerment of Saudi women that their participation in the KASP might have brought to them. This kind of research required me to obtain a lot of information, and understand the meaning of the data and the context before making any conclusions. To do this, I relied on the narratives those women told about their personal and transforming experiences.

Narrative Inquiry Approach

Chase (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) defined narrative inquiry as an “amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (p. 651). Thomas and Znaniecki started using narrative inquiry as a qualitative approach in 1927. They believed that narrative inquiry is about considering experience as a phenomenon, and deserves investigation by scholars (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006), the three important tenets of narrative inquiry are temporality, sociality, and place. Firstly, temporality is where events and people always have a timeline of actions and stories, either past, present or future. Secondly, sociality is where personal conditions are important to consider while telling their stories, which include feelings, reactions, desires, and hopes. Thirdly, place includes the physical elements, and a sequence of story where the events take place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

According to Creswell (2012), researchers started this method when they experienced the amount of lived and told stories of individuals. Narrative inquiry can come in different forms of social and humanities disciplines (Creswell, 2012). It became the phenomenon being studied for researchers and helped them in analyzing stories told (Chase, 2005).

The narrative research approach was this study’s primary strategy. According to Creswell (2012), this approach has been used in literary, historical, sociological, and educational research. It is mainly about collecting stories from individuals, documents, or group conversations about lived and told experiences. The greater the interactive collaboration between the researcher and the participant, the more valuable the narrative data becomes. Narrative stories are not only about personal experiences, it is about identities, how people see themselves, and turning points in their

stories (Creswell, 2012). Accordingly, this study consisted mainly of listening to the participants' stories of lived experiences before, during, and after their involvement with the KASP. This study gave voice to their experiences consisting of their passions, challenges, feelings and visions.

Every research approach has its own challenges. Creswell (2012) stated some of the challenges of the narrative research such as:

- The researchers need to collect extensive information about the participant.
- The researcher needs to have clear understanding of the context of the participant's life.
- It takes a keen eye while gathering data to identify and capture the feeling of the participant and capture the experience.
- It requires active collaboration and discussion between the researcher and the participant to help in understanding the whole story and in the analyzing process later down the road.

This study met those aforementioned challenges. I collected a large amount of data from the participants through interviews and collection of artifacts. Because I shared the same culture as the women I studied, I was able to understand their perspectives although not fully because I was a male researcher. In spite of this discrepancy, I bracketed my male perspective in order to capture the feelings and visions of the participants. Participants gave me their full collaboration to the point of reviewing and approving the transcripts of the interviews they gave for the purpose of this study.

Grounded Theory

In addition to narrative inquiry, I used the grounded theory approach as a qualitative strategy of data collection. Glaser and Strauss helped develop grounded theory approach in sociology in 1967 (Creswell, 2012). They believed that theories should be grounded from the

data in the field, the actions, social process of people, and the interactions. Due to the different interpretations of the meaning and procedures of grounded theory between Glaser and Strauss and Charmaz (2014) with advocating for the constructivist grounded theory, this approach gained popularity in different fields.

Martin and Turner (1986) defined grounded theory as a systematic qualitative research methodology in the social sciences that emphasized a theory from the date on which the researcher conducted his/her study. Grounded theory has two primary characteristics; the constant comparison of data with emerging categories, and the creation of different groups to maximize the similarities and differences among information (Creswell, 2012). Grounded theory requires using multiple stages of data collection to ease the interrelationships of categories of information and data (Charmaz, 2014).

The grounded theory might not have enough flexibility desired by some qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2012). Grounded theory helps the researcher to focus on generating or discovering theories from what the participants have experienced (Creswell, 2012). Grounded theory method not only helps the researcher to get started and stay involved with the data, but also helps spark ideas, bring surprises, and improve the researcher's analytic skills (Charmaz, 2014).

Data Collection Process

After securing the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix B) from the University of St. Thomas, I used personal interviews as the main data collection method. Through personal interviews and collection of artifacts, I obtained a wide range of data that pertained to the research topic.

Selection of Sample

To recruit participants for this study, I used a form of convenience sampling (Merriam and Tisdell, 2017). I engaged some of my co-workers with the social media team at the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to recommend some participants. In turn, I requested every participant to recommend someone else and tell their friends about this research, then contact me if they were interested. (Table 5.1.; see Appendix D) represents the number of participants with their characteristics.

All 15 personal interviews took place in Saudi Arabia sometime between February, 2017 and March, 2017. Those interviews took place in various places such as coffee shops, work places, and restaurants. Choosing the best place to do the interview, sign the consent form, and interview within the time frame are important to have a successful and rich data collection (Creswell, 2012). One participants was accompanied by her mother, another one by her husband, and the third one by her father. Two participants came to the interview place with their friends, who sat at a nearby table. The remaining participants arrived alone at the interview. I asked every participant to read and sign the consent form before we started the interview (Appendix C).

The age range for female participants was between 20 – 40 years old. I interviewed three men who are relatives of those females to get another glimpse of the scholarship impact on their female relatives. There was no age range for male participants since most of them are parents, spouses, or older brothers. Every interview lasted between 60-90 minutes. For confidentiality purposes, I used pseudonyms to identify the participants.

Identifying the interviewees in advance and contacting them was very important to give them a heads up and answer their questions or concerns about the interview. One female participant canceled her interview with me two days before the actual date of the interview due

to a life threatening emergency that happened to one of her family members. The next day, I contacted one of the participants on the waiting list and she took her place. The interview process, according to Creswell (2012), includes designing the study, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing the data, verifying the validity, and considering reliability and generalizability factors.

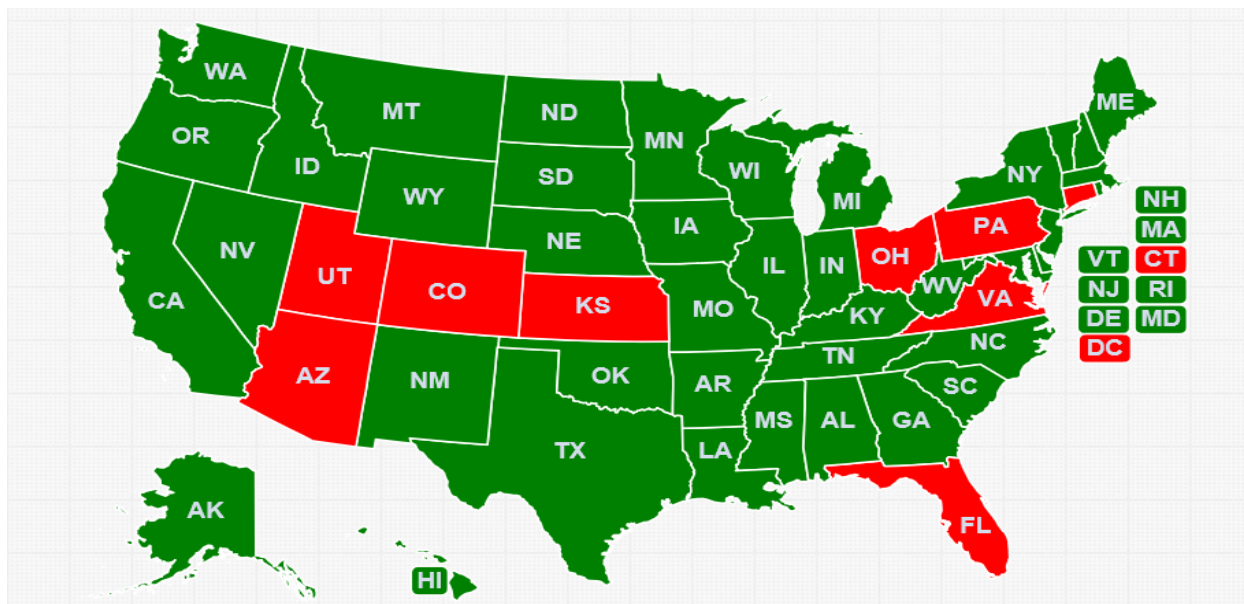


Figure 3.1: States in red are those where research participants used to study in the U.S.

Personal interviews

The main data collection method for this grounded theory research was personal interviews. Most of the interviews was one-on-one interviews. I interviewed fifteen people, twelve Saudi female students who lived in the U.S. for more than two years, and has been in Saudi Arabia for more than a year, and studied under the King Abdullah Scholarship Program. Then I interviewed three male chaperones that lived with their female relatives in the U.S. during their studies. In my research, I studied participant's personality before coming to the interview by asking their friends about them, through the interview process, and by sending follow-up questions to the participants after the interviews. The pre-interview discussion was very important to me as a researcher to make my interviewees relaxed and calm. Explaining the idea

of this research and how the outcomes could help to improve female leadership in the country added more enthusiasm to the conversation.

Interview questions

Personal interviews questions provided consolidated results. Open ended questions led to narratives revealing the lived-stories of the participants. Interview questions included:

1. Tell me about yourself?
2. Could you please tell me about your educational experience before joining the KASP?
3. How did you get the scholarship and what did you imagine your life in the US will look like?
4. Would you talk about your feelings and your family members' feelings before going to study in the United States?
5. Tell me about your experience in America during your study under KASP?
6. What has King Abdullah Scholarship Program added to your personally – academically – and professionally?
7. What have you learned in the U.S. that add to your leadership personality?
8. What skills have you learned in the US that helped you here in Saudi Arabia?
9. Do you think that KASP benefited Saudi female students? If so, how?
10. How do you describe female leadership in Saudi Arabia?
11. Where do you see female leadership in Saudi Arabia ten years from today?
12. Do you like to add anything before we wrap up this conversation?

Collection of Artifacts

In addition to the one-on-one interviews, and for triangulation sake (Merriam and Tisdell, 2017), I collected six meaningful artifacts from the participants. I requested each participant to

provide any artifact of their choice prior to or during the interview, something that always remind them of their time in the U.S. Artifacts included pictures of cars, cake designing machines, dissertation, sport hat, and different materials. These artifacts helped foster my understanding, and uncovered trends in their lives and leadership before, during, and after KASP. Artifacts were also important for each participant, as they brought to life in a symbolic manner participants' stories before they transitioned from Saudi Arabia to the United States, and back and forth. Every artifact had its own story and they told a lot about the participants. The artifacts provided rich resources to analyze the participants' life accounts (Given, 2008).

Ethics and Confidentiality

Confidentiality of the potential participants and the data I collected is very important. Since Saudi Arabia is a conservative and restrictive country, where some of the ideas or actions that might be involved in this research are against the cultural norms such as criticizing religious leaders, meeting with men who are strangers, and having the opportunity to travel without a male relative, I used pseudonyms for my potential participants to make sure a release of this information would not affect them or their families. I created several documents to protect my data and saved the records in different places.

I conducted interviews in public places such as coffee shops and work facilities, since I would not have been permitted to meet privately with nonrelative females. It turned out not every female I interviewed was there with her guardian, most of them came alone or with their friends. All of my interviews were in Arabic language because participants found it easy to express themselves in their mother language. I spent more than two months translating and transcribing all Arabic conversations to English language before analyzing data.

Data Processing and Analysis

“Coding is not an end in itself, but a purposeful step to somewhere” (Bazeley, p. 125, 2013). After reading the data from the participants, different themes and focused codes emerged. All themes and codes came from the personal interview data and from the analyzing process of that data. I used paragraph by paragraph coding. During the reading and analyzing of the data, I discovered how the concepts in this research are related to each other. Listening to new experiences and new inputs from every participants enriched this research study.

Coding is a tool of querying data and an opportunity to test assumptions. Coding is about labeling some data based on my understanding. It also helps any researcher to attend to the detail of the data (Bazeley, 2013). During the coding process in my study, I used different colors for each code. Color coding helped me to distinguish between the codes, and made my transcripts look beautiful. Coding is about aggregating the whole text to small categories of information, finding evidence to support the code from the data, and then assigning different labels to these codes. The best way to code is to start with five or six categories and by more reading and re-reviewing the data, those codes will expand (Creswell, 2012). Finally, data analysis is more than simply finding a few themes to discuss. It is about getting close to the data and seeing how important it is to you as a researcher.

Limitations and Internal Validity

One such limitation is that my research study and its findings may not translate to female students of other ethnicities. Limitations are important to note in any research study because it shows the researcher where new efforts need to be made, and considered as an opportunity for new challenges (Creswell, 2012). Limitations have nothing to do with invalidating the findings; it might be an inspiration for someone else. Ensuring the accurate representation of the

participants, the internal validity, and the accuracy of the information is important in any research study. Researchers need to look to themselves first, their participants, and to the readers (Creswell, 2012).

Another limitation concern was the female participants who were accompanied by their male guardian to the place of the interview. I felt that action might make it challenging for the participants to speak openly and freely and since this might affect the validity of my study, I asked every chaperone to sit in another place of the coffee shop and not to get involve in the conversation until I finish with the female participant first, then later conduct his part of the interview.

Ensuring the accurate representation of the participants, the internal validity, and the accuracy of the information is important in any research study. Validation is an aspect of evaluating any study. Validation in qualitative research is based on the extensive time spent in the field, conducting interviews, analyzing dense description, and how the researcher is close to the participants. The more the researcher does these things, the more they add to the value or accuracy of their study (Creswell, 2009). The researcher's reliability and the validation of the data procedures include checking the transcripts, reviewing the data, and reviewing the interpretation (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2009), the more the researcher engages with participants, the more he/she gets accurate and reliable data.

Personal Biases

According to Creswell (2007), it is important for the researcher to clarify all of his/her biases before starting the research, and that will help the researcher to approach the study. All past comments, experiences, and biases might affect the interpretation and the study approach. To avoid all those biases, I recorded my potential prejudices and personal perspectives on a side

note, just to protect my approach to the research question. I attempted to avoid bias by reviewing my research more than once and deleting any biased comments, and also by offering the study to more than one individual to read and critique it.

Some of these biases include, the researcher as a member of the Saudi community, I am aware of the lack of leadership opportunities for Saudi women. Women in Saudi Arabia have faced an on-going ignorance from the top leaders and business men in the country over years. Second, feminist research matters to me and my colleagues who want to see their wives, daughters, and sisters in top leadership positions in Saudi Arabia. Third, I am a strong advocate of women, and I always want them to reach high positions in a country where their talents have not been utilized enough. Fourth, women in Saudi Arabia need to be heard. Their voices, opinions, and world views are important to me and to a lot of people in Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I hope to attain the following through my research: 1) provide Saudi female students with a guideline to improve their leadership skills and take advantage of the scholarship program; 2) illuminate the outcomes of the scholarship program on Saudi female students when they return to their home country after studying in the U.S.; and 3) provide Saudi female students with an important research and a reason to break down any barriers that may limit their ability to become leaders in Saudi Arabia. The ultimate goal of this research is to highlight the outcomes of the scholarship program and how it might benefit Saudi females and their families.

CHAPTER FOUR

EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF SAUDI FEMALES BEFORE AND DURING KASP

The purpose of this study was to learn how the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) enhanced Saudi female students' leadership skills while they studied in the United States of America and after they returned home upon their graduation. The findings of this study resulted from 15 one-on-one interviews, and from various artifacts collected from twelve Saudi females and three male chaperones. Three major themes emerged from the analysis of the data: pre-KASP leadership experiences of Saudi females, experience and perception of leadership in the U.S., and family members as support resources. This chapter first presents the participants' views about their experiences before receiving KASP. It then shows the women's leadership experiences while studying under the scholarship program in the U.S.

Pre-KASP Leadership Experiences of Saudi females

A pattern emerged from the interview questions regarding the leadership experiences participants had prior to joining the KASP. They revealed that Saudi education did not expose them to leadership opportunities. Participants also stated whether they had individual leadership experiences prior to joining the KASP. I will describe these two sub-themes below.

Saudi Arabia education and lack of leadership preparation

Ten participants recalled that the Saudi education system did not expose them to leadership opportunities. Seven participants studied in public high schools, and five attended private high schools either in Riyadh or in Jeddah. Participants who studied in private schools admitted that their schools were better equipped to prepare Saudi women to leadership positions. Reham and Dalia both blamed their public high schools for failing to prepare them to the college life, or to

introduce any workshop activities to improve their skills, such as computer technical skills or any other basic administration training. Reham attributed the lack of creativity during her public high school education in Saudi Arabia to the absence of extracurricular activities such as sports and acting. She stated, "... we had no 'think outside the box' activities, and that affected me negatively later when I went to the United States... I could not keep up with my colleagues from different countries." For Reham, the education she received in Saudi Arabia did not expose her to leadership opportunities. She, however, loved going to school to meet and play with her friends. She said, "I was dreaming of building my own character. I was dreaming of doing something big while attending those schools in Saudi Arabia, but that didn't happen."

On the other hand, some participants reported a measure of exposure to leadership opportunities before they joined college. For example, Buthina recounted her experience studying at the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu schools, considered one of the country's best elementary and secondary schools. Those schools always provided their students with plentiful personality-building activities such as public speaking games and writing a monthly magazine for the school. According to Buthina, such activities always inspired her and other students to be change makers in their communities. Buthina added that she always learned to fight for her rights and self-confidence by working hard in her private school. "I was improved personally by joining such schools," Buthina said. A similar opinion about the high-quality education in Saudi private schools came from Ghada. Her private school had small, 15-student classes, and students engaged in many activities such as visiting local factories and having Saudi female role models as speakers every month in her school, which improved their educational experiences and provided them with different learning opportunities.

Amal, similarly, appreciated and recognized one teacher's role in shaping her future. "My best teacher in high school, her name is Zubidah and she is the one who made me love biology because of her excellent way of dealing with students and her daily compliments to me and my colleagues about how smart we were." Lama agreed with Amal that some teachers could influence a student's life positively. She reported that most of her teachers in Saudi Arabia were supportive and eager to see their students in the best positions and that could make them proud.

Regarding higher education, Dalia shared that she could not benefit much from the Saudi university education either. She criticized the five years she spent at King Saud University: "During those five years, I used to memorize the subject, study, and take the exam. That is it. No room for creativity, no active student organizations to build my personality, or any room for innovations." For Buthina, leadership preparation entails learning major foreign languages such as English. However, she complained as saying, "My English writing skill was very bad when I went to the U.S. because I didn't learn the skill of writing well in Saudi schools." Likewise, Latifah shared that learning English while in the U.S. was difficult because she did not receive sufficient foundations in Saudi Arabia.

Lama and Dalia also criticized Saudi colleges' excessive emphasis on general subjects, including Islamic areas and Arabic studies. Lama added, "During my bachelor studies, I felt like I have been studying nonsense subjects and many unneeded information." Dalia summarized her educational experience in Saudi Arabia by saying, "I was studying in Saudi Arabia without knowing what is next." Latifah agreed with Dalia and Reham's statements about the lack of transformational educational opportunities in the Saudi educational system both in high schools and in the college level. Latifah characterized her Saudi school experience as that of a typical Saudi girl: "It wasn't fun at all to study in Saudi Arabia." On the other hand, Amal stated that she did not

have a decent education quality at public schools in Saudi Arabia. She looked forward to studying in a private school where students received significant attention and perform visionary activities, but her father could not afford the high tuition fees.

Both Ghada and Buthina blamed the lack of leadership preparation on Saudi professors for creating unhealthy educational environments. They both admitted that professors in Saudi colleges were very strict and always scolded their students. One day Buthina's professor put her down as he said to her "Hey, Buthina you are not going to pass this class." Buthina added that the professor hated her because she was from a different city and wished to discourage her from passing the class. In the contrary, Buthina passed that class, after which she stopped by the instructor's office to tell him she just graduated. She urged the teacher not to try to ruin someone else's life by putting them down. Latifah noted that Saudi university professors are not supportive of their students and do not encourage them enough to reach their full potential."

Individual leadership experiences

Prior to receiving KASP and traveling to the United States to further their education, participants indicated that they hardly came across leadership opportunities. For example, Sarah claimed that the Saudi community was not ready in 2009 to accept a female lawyer. She commented, "The judicial system in Saudi Arabia is fully controlled by males. Some judges refused to talk to my friend who is a female lawyer and asked for a chaperone presence inside the court." Nine participants lacked leadership skills prior to joining the KASP. Only three participants mentioned any organizational or co-curricular engagements, volunteer activities, or events that built their leadership personalities before coming to America.

Salma, however, joined the first official mixed gender volunteer team in Jeddah in 2008, three years before she traveled to the U.S. In 2010, Salma traveled to Turkey to join a Leader

Training Academy with more than 400 trainees from different Arab countries. Trainees took many leadership courses for more than a month. Salma added, “I was trying to build myself. I wasn’t that interested in shopping and following the fashion, I know I was capable of doing important stuff that can provide a brighter future for me.” Salma claimed that she was a leader prior to the KASP; every year she accomplished much through different projects.

Nine participants observed that they were powerless even in their own homes because their male relatives held the responsibility for household needs as higher such as buying groceries and paying monthly utility bills without asking for their help or opinions. Dalia concurred that Saudi girls are mostly dependent upon their male relatives for the majority of tasks in Saudi Arabia. However, participants were on their own once they arrived in the United States. Dalia also noted, “I came to the U.S. with no leadership skills at all.” Ghada discussed how her shyness kept her isolated for a long time in the Saudi city of Jeddah. She attributed her shyness to the conservative society she lived in most of her life in Jeddah, which prevented her from taking the few initiatives her society could offer females, and from living a regular life in her country.

Educational Experiences and Perceptions of Leadership in the U.S.

Healthy Educational Environment

Ten participants explained their educational experiences in the U.S. with words such as “great experience”, “amazing”, “very positive”, “so much fun”, “beautiful”, and “informative”. Dalia felt that the education system in the U.S. was significantly different from that of Saudi Arabia. She benefited greatly from the American educational environment and the way professors delivered information to their students:

This study abroad experience improved me a lot. My eyes were opened in how the academic life should look like. Everything was different. The way students discuss with

their teachers, the way teachers run their classes, and the research process was different. It wasn't all about improving students academically, but also about improving them personally.

Lama also complimented the American educational system and curriculums. "Classes were fun; curriculums and its content were great. They are updated unlike the old curriculums in Saudi Arabia," Lama said. Latifah shared her experience of studying in America. "The education experience in the U.S. was more than getting high grades, it was more about enjoying teaching and learning new things."

Tahani, in the one-on-one interviews, described the role of teachers in the American universities. "Most if not all teachers I had, were friendly and they supported all of their international students." She added, "Maybe, they already knew about international students' struggles in a different culture." Similarly, Latifah spoke about how her great teachers added value to her education, "Many teachers in the U.S. really care about their students." Latifah confirmed that professors in the U.S. universities don't just teach for the sake of teaching, she thought that they teach from the bottom of their hearts. "Classroom environment was very healthy. There was no teacher and student relationship, we were like friends. It was very important to me academically at that time."

Ahlam was surprised by the way her U.S. teachers treated her nicely and how many of them were glad she kept trying to succeed. "Teachers in the U.S. get happy when their students visit them in their office hours to ask about things related to the subject they teach. Here in Saudi Arabia, I don't remember if I visited one of my teachers in their office hours in the past." She added, "Teachers either can be supportive to you and your talents or they can destroy you and your ambitions by the way they treat you." Ghada noted how it was important for students and

teachers to build trusting relationships. “When you and your teacher trust each other, then you will get good education,” Ghada said.

Some students reported that the positive on-campus experiences provided a transformational tool for learning. For Zainah, the university library was an amazing place. It provided her with the best environment to study. It had quiet rooms and high-tech computers you can use anytime. She also spoke about how study groups helped her earn good grades. Her classmates were helpful and assisted greatly with her homework. Zainah spent many hours in the library with her classmates and they became like family and cared about each other. "The university's library helped me to focus in the study and provided access to many quality resources" Zainah added.

Saudi women’s leadership enhancement

While many participants acknowledged the importance of the KASP in enhancing their leadership and communication skills, they also pointed out that the whole journey was challenging because it had many vicissitudes. As opposed to the education the women received in Saudi Arabia, U.S. universities offered them opportunities to lead and become leaders when they joined students' organizations, learned about problem solving, appreciated new opportunities, and enhanced their bicultural experience.

Nine participants mentioned how joining student organizations and volunteer groups while studying in the U.S. affected positively their personalities. They learned communication, attitude, and some work ethics by joining such organizations. Salma referred to student organizations as a great place to meet and work with new people from different cultures and backgrounds. “While I was in California, I participated in five different volunteer groups in the surrounded community and when I moved to New Haven, Connecticut, I participated in three

different student organizations inside campus for both domestic and international students,” Salma said. She added that she learned much from those activities, meetings, and involvements, which changed her way of thinking.

In the one-on-one interviews, Sarah described her involvement in different student organizations inside and outside campus. “I was an active member of Arab Student Organization in the university and I did a lot of volunteering hours with the Food Bank Organization in D.C. area. It is a non-profit organization.” She reported, “I worked hard to clean the floors in the food bank warehouse and labeled food before we sell it to underprivileged people.” Amal shared her experience in the biology major organization at Wichita State University. She also organized two girls’ nights inside the campus. “The idea of these girls' nights is to have Arab and American girls come together so we can clarify many of the misconceptions about us Muslim girls. It was mix between joy and knowledge.” Amal represented Saudi Arabia and went to three local schools in Wichita to talk about the Saudi culture and teach young students some Arabic language basics.

Buthina was an active member of Us to U.S—a Saudi volunteer group with events in many American cities—in addition to helping the Saudi club events at her school. Buthina was the group’s president in Cleveland, Ohio. Buthina and thirty group members volunteered to assist hungry kids and homeless people in downtown Cleveland. She shared how joining such an organization helped her to gain managerial skills. “One day I decided to open my own business in the field of cake designing. I took a management class in the university just to learn more about the basics of being a good manager,” Buthina said. She later added, “Even though I am not a business major student, I work in the business field now because of my volunteering experience I gained while I was in the U.S.,” Buthina said. Tahani, Dalia, and Zainah confessed

that they did not participate at all in student organizations while they were in the U.S. In the one-on-one interviews, Dalia said:

Unfortunately, I didn't participate in any student organizations inside my university and I really regret it nowadays when I see other Saudi females benefiting from their volunteer work while they were abroad. I was like, going to school, finish my homework, and go home. This was a very big gap in my study abroad experience. All the skills I acquired in the US were from living by myself.

Leadership consists also of practicing problem-solving. Most of the participants developed problem-solving skills during their time in the United States. Many struggled a lot in difficult circumstances to adjust to the new culture and to complete the challenge of studying abroad successfully. Eleven of twelve participants completed the scholarship applications, finished all VISA requirements, and planned the trip to the U.S. without any assistance from their family members. Buthina faced her first problem-solving issue when deciding which English school to pick. "I finally picked Akron, Ohio because it is less expensive than LA, and because my brother could easily be dragged to LA temptations (night clubs and these stuff, you know what I mean). I felt like I am his mother and I need to take care of him."

Buthina faced many struggles that required a great ability to solve problems during her stay in the US. One of her close relatives died in her first semester, then she broke up with her fiancé, and finally missed three of her best friends' weddings. "It was very tough period of time, I was tired mentally, in the end, I was patient and I learned how to be strong and not give up." Buthina said. Tahani also lost her mother while she was studying in Washington D.C., and she almost gave up her dreams to sadness:

My mother passed away while I was studying in DC. I went back home for three months after her death. I wasn't feeling like studying after that tragedy. Due to my depression mood, most of my family members tried to convince me to finish my master in one of the local universities in Saudi Arabia including my father who was a big supporter of my decision to study abroad. I resisted, and I insisted to finish what I started two years ago.

During one of the interviews, Dalia was proud of how she survived in the U.S. while living alone. She reported that she learned a lot and gained more experience from making mistakes. "I needed a certificate, I needed more positive things in my personality, and I needed to change. I was like, take it easy, work on it, and life will go on. I cried a lot for missing my family members, but never gave up," Dalia said. Similarly, Ahlam was also proud of taking responsibility for herself when she was in the U.S. She said "I was responsible while I was studying abroad from A to Z. I took care of my apartment, my car, and paying all utility fees every month without delays." Taking the full responsibility for herself was something new for Dalia and other Saudi female students. They have learned self-reliance while they were in the U.S.

To explain her leadership skill of problem-solving, Dalia chose a picture of her car in the U.S. as an artifact. She showed me the plate license of the car with her name on it. Coming from a country where women are not allowed to drive, Dalia explained how she got her driver license and loved the experience of driving her own car. She added, "In the U.S. I learned how to change the battery of my car, how important to take it to the mechanic shop regularly, and how to compare prices between mechanics before service to save some money." In a like manner, Ghada spoke of her experiences driving in Pennsylvania. "In the U.S. I drove car for the first time. My

circumstances in Pennsylvania, and the bad transportation system there, forced me to learn how to drive and take care of myself. I gained more confidence while I was there.”

When I asked Sarah if she had faced any problem-solving issues in the U.S., she said, “Absolutely, every day was a problem-solving day to me.” She added, “We as humans need advice or help from our close relatives when we face any problem, no matter what. The idea of taking the responsibility is hard by itself, but I did well.” In the one-on-one interviews, Amal talked about how she felt useless in the face of obstacles during her first days in America with her father:

Living with my old father overseas was quite an experience. The hardest first days were a teaching period in my life that I will not forget. My father went to one of the local mosques to ask for help and if someone could assist us. I felt like I can’t do anything in this place or I can’t survive without English language, and this is why I studied so hard during studying in the English language center. I used to write very basic sentences and memorize them every day. Such as “We are looking for two-bedroom apartments” or “where we can find fresh vegetables and fruits.” Just to survive.

Amal solved most of the obstacles by studying English faster and always asking for help from the Saudi club members and from the international student office in the university. She did all of that while taking care of her father who insisted to accompany her in the U.S. even though he is 67 years old. Amal used to skip a few classes in order to take her father to different clinics around Wichita, Kansas. She managed to take care of her father, their apartment, and finish her studies with an honor degree.

When I asked Lama about how KASP enhanced her problem solving skills, she laughed and said, “I have been learning and experiencing all problem solving techniques from the first

day in America until I left after graduation.” She felt that KASP helped her think, speak her mind, and plan for her future. “It was like a continuous learning experience,” Lama said. She illustrated:

In my first day of school in Boston, I got lost while going to the English school. The next day, I learned to ask before leaving the house how to go, what is the nearest road to school, and what is the bus number. I was learning at least two or three new words every week. I was learning all the time, I was learning inside the classroom and I was learning outside the classroom from the life.

Leadership exposure in the US gave the research participants a great sense of opportunity. Participants used the word “opportunity” 52 times during personal interviews. Most participants used the word opportunity to characterize a problem-solving issue they faced while they studied abroad. Buthina explained how some Saudi female students faced many difficulties that were tough to solve overseas, and in the meantime some relatives back home underestimated their abilities and waited for them to fail, lose the opportunity, and return home:

Many Saudi females were fighting while studying in the U.S. They were fighting people back home who like to destroy their dreams and make them insecure. It was [as if] they [did not] trust us to get the job done. I faced the same problem inside my family. Some of my close relatives asked my father many times to tell me to quit and return to the country. My father ignored them because he believed in me.

Intercultural change was also part of the leadership experience participants in this study underwent in the US. Eight participants appreciated the bicultural experience they lived in the US. During personal interviews, participants frequently mentioned knowing the American culture, meeting new people, and enjoying the transformation of their personalities. In this

matter, Ghada said, “after studying abroad and living in a new culture for more than three years, my friends here in Saudi think I am now more open minded, I am not sure about that, maybe I am braver now. I stopped judging people and focus more in improving myself.” She added, “Dealing with different people in the U.S. made me braver and helped me to trust myself more and express my feelings with no hesitations.”

Ghada felt she gained more self-confidence in her interaction with American students than with Saudis. Saudi girls in the U.S. used to laugh at her if she made a mistake while speaking in English. In contrast, “My American friends did not laugh at me when I made mistakes. They knew, we were there to learn and work hard to build ourselves.” Lama, also talked about how living in another culture and an international experience taught her responsibility. “I was responsible for feeding myself, going to school, and cleaning my own place. Then after that, comes the financial difficulties. You are paying for the rent, utilities, and other fees from here and there.”

Tahani reported that, listening was one of her biggest takeaways from her study abroad experience in the U.S. “I have learned to listen to people and learn from their experiences and how did they solve any obstacle they have faced in their lives.” She talked about how joining the KASP helped her to learn more about communication and team-work skills. “Every day was a challenge, every day was difficult away from your home and family, but I proved them wrong and reached my goal,” Tahani said. On the other hand, Sarah compared Saudi and the American cultures and explained how learning about American culture in the U.S. added to her personality. “Due to our traditions and community manners here in Saudi Arabia, I was not accepting other people easily or I wasn’t aware how diversity is beautiful in our world. God created this world with different people, different cultures, different languages, different religions, different

thinking's, and different life styles." She also talked about how joining the KASP enhanced her knowledge about other cultures who shared the globe with her. "In the U.S., I have learned how to explore the life. I was trying hard to learn about other languages, one meal from each country, and know about other religions and different beliefs."

Family as a Source of Support

In addition to their limited pre-KASP leadership experiences, and their perception of leadership in the US, participants in this study also highlighted the impact of the KASP on their family relationship, and the support they got both before and during their stay in the United States. For example, Sarah's and Latifah's fathers initially refused to accept the idea of sending their daughters to study abroad. Sarah described the whole idea by saying:

I am from a conservative family. The idea of studying abroad was not acceptable. All my family members disagreed with me studying in the U.S. in the beginning, especially my father. He is an old man and he didn't get the importance of education and getting a higher degree.

She eventually received the approval of her father and brothers after much discussion. They accepted the scholarship award when they were convinced that such an opportunity would be unlikely to come around in the near future. Similarly, Latifah's father was hesitant at first, but then granted her permission for her daughter to pursue her application for the scholarship. However, when he faced the questioning of those fathers who opposed the idea that their daughters should go overseas to study, Latifah's father told her to keep everything secret and finish all the scholarship process without telling anyone else.

Eleven of 12 participants mentioned that the support they received from their family members was a key factor to their academic success in the United States. Like any other

collective society, the family is the most important social institution in Saudi Arabia. For example, Amal stated “My father just retired from the Saudi Army and he insisted to travel with me and assist me in the first months in the U.S. However, he was my chaperone for over two years then my brother replaced him for two and a half years.” Buthina who studied in Ohio revealed that communicating 24/7 via Google Plus with her family back in Saudi Arabia kept her strong and resilient: “I was like living with them virtually.”

Dalia received family support from early stages. She got a lot of support from her family members even before she left for the U.S.:

They were very supportive and prayed a lot asking God to help me during the upcoming journey. They helped me psychologically and financially. They were with me in every step asking me what I am going to do in my first days there in the U.S., which language institute I am going to attend, and what is the major I am going to study. They worked hard with me to have a plan before leaving Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, I was warned to protect myself and stay away from bad friends especially I am going to be alone in the US.

Buthina reported that some of friends did not have the same support from their families. They suffered financially in the DC area known for being very expensive. The lack of support from families caused some of her friends to fall in the habit of unnecessarily spending money. Lama reported that she came from a family who respects and believes in education as a transferable tool. She added that compared to other families in the district, they were considered as one of the well-educated families. Her parents supported their kids' education in order for them to maximize their chances to earn college degrees. Her parents were very supportive of her decision, and eager to see their children prosper.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the educational and leadership experiences of the KASP women beneficiaries before and during their academic journey in the United States. While most participants did not receive some form of formal or informal leadership training in Saudi Arabia, their journey in the US offered them opportunities to develop their self-esteem, to use their critical thinking, and build self-confidence. The support of their new culture in America, as well as that of their own families helped them grow as individuals and as leaders. The next chapter presents the various ways in which the participants or their families benefitted from KASP upon returning home. The chapter also lays out how participants envisioned the future of female leadership in Saudi Arabia.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE IMPACT OF KASP ON SAUDI FEMALES UPON RETURN TO SAUDI ARABIA

The purpose of this study was to learn how KASP enhanced Saudi female students' leadership skills while they were in the U.S. and after they returned home upon their graduation. This chapter describes the effects of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program on Saudi female students' leadership skills and the changes that such a program made in their lives when they returned to Saudi Arabia.

The findings in this chapter address the major research question of how has the King Abdullah Scholarship Program enhanced the leadership skills of Saudi female beneficiaries? Participants in this study gave different responses with regard to how KASP affected their leadership skills when they returned home. Many participants described how the experience of studying in the United States influenced them and transformed their careers; others reported that the program did not affect them or change their lives that much. However, for most of the participants, KASP had an impact on them because it enhanced their leadership skills, and helped them readjust to and compete in the Saudi job market.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the three major themes that emerged from the data: a) the effects of KASP on Saudi females, b) the changes in the participants' lives, and c) participants' vision of female leadership in Saudi Arabia. I present these findings and their sub-themes in the following sections.

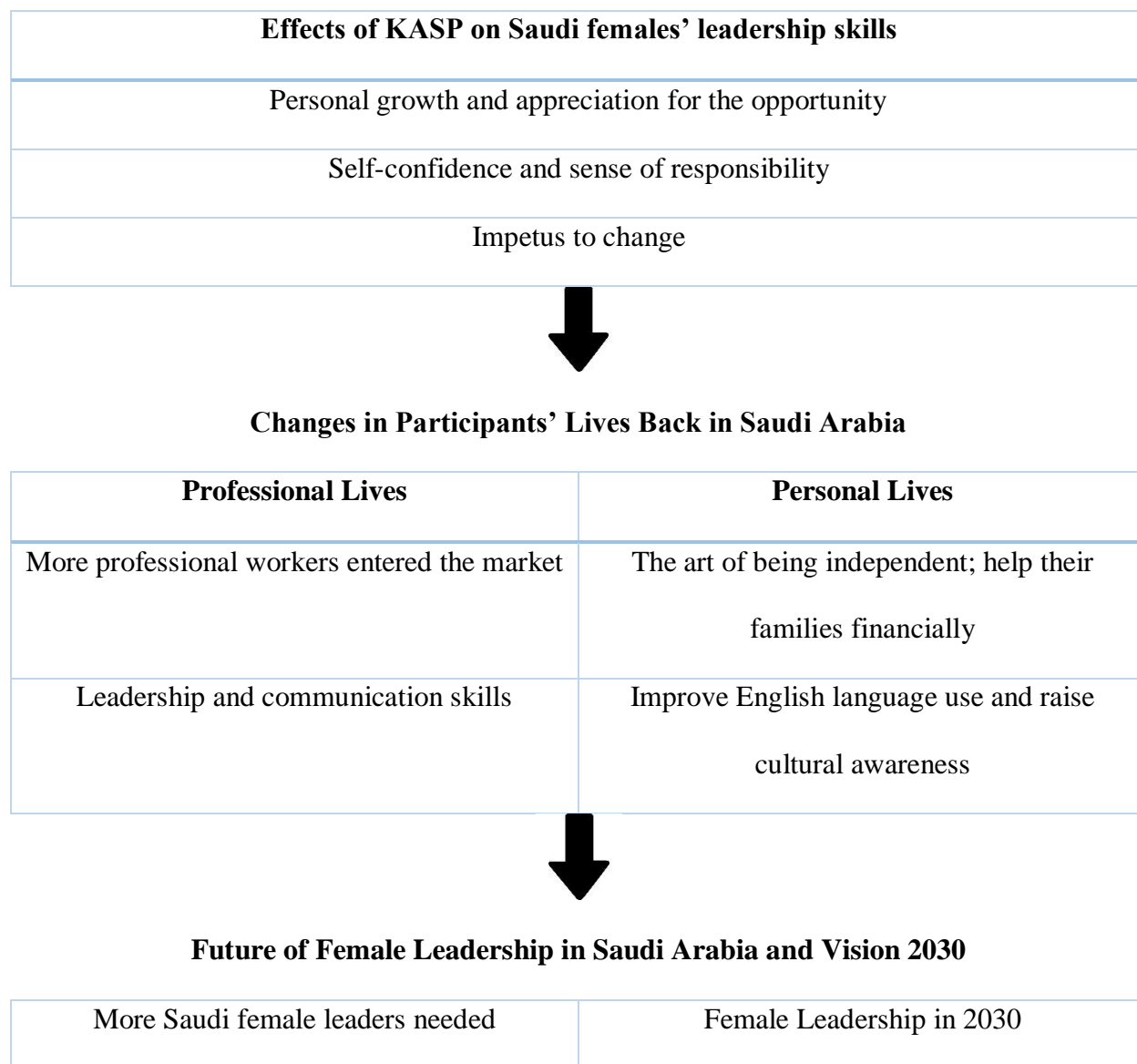


Figure 5.1. Effects of King Abdullah Scholarship Program on Saudi females' leadership skills post-graduation: Major themes.

The Effects of KASP on Saudi Women upon their Return Home

Data collected to determine whether the King Abdullah Scholarship had an impact on the leadership of the women who benefitted upon their return to their home country yielded the following sub-themes: personal growth and professional worth, self-confidence and sense of responsibility, and impetus to change.

Personal Growth and Appreciation for the Opportunity

The first theme addressed personal growth and appreciation for the opportunity. Participants' experiences studying abroad provided them with opportunities to experience different educational environments, new cultural experiences, multiple growth opportunities, and enhanced leadership skill development. Nine participants reported such experiences during their personal interviews. Buthina shared the beneficial outcomes of studying abroad: "KASP opportunity opened many doors for women in the Saudi market. Those doors were closed for a long time." She claimed that her involvement in student organizations and volunteering opportunities on and off campus built her personality. "Every day of the KASP was an opportunity to grow. Trusting yourself and your abilities cannot be gained overnight. We suffered daily in a foreign country to prove ourselves." Buthina during the interview mentioned how taking some management classes in the university is helping her today to manage her private business and how such classes made her understand the best way to lead the business and understand the market around her.

Dalia, too, believed that KASP made women grow professionally. "In that four years' experience, I grew up a lot and faced my own challenges." Dalia is working currently in the largest military hospital in Saudi Arabia as a consultant in the health care quality department. She added, "80 percent of my career now depends on the skills I have learned in America. KASP was the phase that facilitated my career phase nowadays." Dalia shared how the study overseas provided a growth opportunity. "KASP experience was more than an experience to find myself, drive my own car, hang out with friends, and learn a new language. It was a life experience to discover yourself, your abilities, and get the chance to taste the freedom of choice in different aspects in your life." She claimed that KASP helped her to strengthen her English language

skills, especially when English is the official language in her work environment. She also mentioned how the internship in the U.S. assisted her to understand the hidden details in the medical field and its management.

Another example is Ghada, who called herself a highly shy person before joining KASP. She said the program enhanced her leadership skills. Ghada found encouragements from her classmates and teachers. She became more confident while giving presentations in the classroom eventually. After studying for more than three years in the U.S. in a healthy environment that drives students to success, Ghada talked about how KASP experience helped her to trust herself more and have ambition. "I would like to be the pharmacy manager of Al-Nour hospital in the near future" She indicated, "I learned how to deal with different people in the U.S. and to understand that each of us has different circumstances which sometimes make it hard to communicate properly." She confirmed that study groups in the U.S. helped her to be more organized and be always on time. In Saudi Arabia, she complained about other hospital staff being always late for the meetings, and things in the hospital are moving slowly while she is always on time and would like to finish all her work before she go home.

Similarly, Amal talked about how volunteering during her studies in the U.S. helped her today in recognizing her leadership abilities in Saudi Arabia. "I have learned how to volunteer with unknown people to help strangers in a poor country somewhere in this world and that what made me look nowadays for any volunteering opportunity here in Saudi Arabia," Amal added. Helping to feed the homeless in the surrounding community in Kansas provided Amal with an opportunity to grow personally and know about the world around her and what they need to avoid life struggles. Now Amal is leading the way to participate in feeding people in need in her home town Riyadh, and is taking the responsibility to tell her family members and her friends the

beauty of giving and assisting people in need. "I am planning to do three volunteering activities this year with the girls' section in the general sport authority in Riyadh" Amal confirmed.

Tahani said she could not deny the importance of KASP in improving her life. "KASP gave Saudi females more motivation to move forward," Tahani said. "This program not only reshaped my personality, but also put me on the right path to create my own future." Tahani during the three years she spent in the U.S. lost her mother, but did not give up and returned to Saudi without a certificate. That loss helped her grow personally and fight all the circumstances to reach her goal. Tahani works now in the Saudi foreign ministry, and she is now helping her father in supporting the family financially. During the interview with Tahani, she sent a message to each Saudi girl studying outside the country now by saying: "If you got a scholarship opportunity do not waste it. You have to take advantage of every single day of it, study well, and follow your dreams." She added, "It was impossible to see this Tahani today without that studying abroad experience."

Sarah offered a unique perspective—she thought that KASP benefited both genders. She observed, "It is an excellent opportunity for both genders. It prepared and will prepare them well for the work environment here in Saudi Arabia." Sarah also discussed how KASP enhanced her leadership personality by being a leader every day. A leader who takes care of rent, utility bills, and buying groceries in a foreign country even though, her brother was living with her in the U.S. "I have grown up in a community where females come second in everything. KASP changed all that. Now a lot of Saudi people pay attention to the Saudi female achievements inside and outside the country, they hear about female accomplishments abroad regularly," Sarah said. She added, "Back in the years, the idea of having a Saudi female doctor or lawyer was impossible because of the lack of encouragement inside the Saudi family and the male

domination in the medical and law fields.” Sarah is working now in the law firm where female representation is low in this field compared to male lawyers, and she concluded her personal interview with a powerful message when she said, “We Saudi females spent most of our lives here to find an opportunity; now we create them.”

Both Latifah and Salma shared that not every female beneficiary took advantage of KASP or even appreciated the opportunity. “In my opinion, KASP is a useful program, but it depends on the Saudi female student if she wants to benefit from it or not,” Latifah said. She talked about some of the Saudi club girls at her university who socialized every weekend to cook and dance as if they were still back home and not taking this opportunity seriously. Due to all of that isolating activities from the American culture, some of these Saudi girls spent a long time in learning the English language, and some left the country after they failed to find an acceptance letter from an accredited school. Latifah added, “I felt like this is not me. I came here to change and improve myself and know the American culture, not to stay all the time with my people. I felt like I was in Saudi Arabia. That was my last event with them.” Salma shared this concern:

The program itself cannot change anything. It depends to the Saudi female and how willing is she to change herself and get all the advantages of such a program. I have met Saudi females who didn't try to change. They traveled to the U.S. and come back to Saudi with the same personality—no improvement at all. They were together all the time. They used to go out, cook, and study together and they made no effort to have foreign friends or hangout with any international students. A friend of mine, lost her scholarship because she changed her school without a permission from SACM just to study with her high school's friends.

Additionally, I requested participants to produce one artifact of their choosing, some memory of their life under KASP in the United States. Dalia shared a story related to the photograph of her personalized license plate: “I wasn’t imagining going to the car mechanic shop in my life; well, I did in the U.S.” In the U.S., Dalia learned how to drive a car, even though it was still [at that time] illegal for women to drive in Saudi Arabia. She even shared how the experience of driving was difficult at first for all her Saudi female friends. “My female friends couldn’t drive easily in the US because this thing is forbidden in their own country and they have no previous experience,” Dalia said. She decided to obtain her driver’s license and took the initiative to learn how to drive. She faced some initial difficulties in vehicle maintenance, but she characterized the challenge as a beautiful learning experience. “I wasn’t aware of how changing the car battery regularly is important; that was all my father duties in Saudi Arabia,” Dalia added. Dalia loved her car in the U.S. because it helped her to save money and took her everywhere she wanted.

Artifacts also showed appreciation for the opportunity offered to women by the KASP. Ahlam brought a small pin with two flags: The Saudi Arabian flag and the American flag. She started this part of the interview with the statement, “This pin has flags of the best countries in the world.” She expressed her desire for the country’s friendship to last forever. Ahlam described how living in the U.S. changed her life, and added to her personality and gave her the opportunity to work in a private company. She was very emotional during the personal interview; she spoke of the “old days” and the beginning of KASP. “This interview brought good memories back. Sometimes you don’t feel how happy moments fly by so fast,” Ahlam added. The next day, Ahlam sent me a text message: “Thank you for the emotions and every single memory I recalled during the interview

Self-Confidence and Responsibility

Data analysis revealed a second common theme—self-reliance and responsibility. Eight participants acknowledged that KASP helped them to improve their self-reliance skills and made them more responsible for their actions and decisions. Relating to her experience in the U.S., Amal described how KASP helped her discover new things in herself such as self-reliance, patience, and taught her hard life lessons. "KASP taught my father an important lesson; he can trust his daughter and rely on her to do many things." Amal explained how living away with her father from home taught her the money management skill that she uses now in Riyadh. "While I was in Kansas, I put budget for everything. I put budget for my father medications, budget for the house grocery, budget for rent, utilities, and other bills, and budget for our monthly shopping," Amal said. Amal concluded, "I think what matters at the end of KASP is what skills you gained from the whole journey."

Abdullah, Amal's father, talked about his daughter's struggle with having so much responsibility in the U.S. He described their initial days in the U.S. as nightmares. He recalls his daughter crying almost every night because she missed her mother and sisters in Saudi Arabia and felt homesick for the first three months. Abdullah admitted that he waited for his daughter to give up and return home, but she did not. "During that tough time, Amal kept fighting and fighting. One day she told me, either it is getting the certificate, or I will keep studying my whole life. She believed in herself a lot and that what makes me proud of her till this day," Abdullah said.

Several other participants attributed increased responsibility and self-confidence to their personalities when they returned home. Dalia said, "Our male relatives were doing everything for us here in Saudi Arabia. When we traveled to the U.S. it was the time [for us] to take the

responsibility. Nowadays we share the responsibilities.” Sarah echoed those comments: “Before we [left for] the U.S., the Saudi community was not accepting the idea [that] women can handle tough work, can live alone in a foreign country, and can manage to lead their own lives and make decisions without a help from a male chaperone.” Dalia added, “I was alone in Virginia and I dealt with many issues by myself. I got my driver license, looked for new home, and traveled all over the place without help from anyone.” One reason for Ghada's being more independent was her brother's transfer to Washington State, which forced her to assume responsibility and prove herself. “When my brother transferred to another school, I took care of everything. I changed the apartment to a smaller one. I took a lot of decisions by myself and I felt the responsibility.”

Lama shared her experiences of how learning self-reliance in the United States is helping her today in Saudi Arabia. “You are not going to gain your rights until you ask for them,” Lama said. She added, “I learned responsibility from my volunteering work in the U.S.” Working and helping people in need raised Lama's awareness of how being a responsible person could help you and the entire community. Likewise, Salma agreed that KASP afforded an opportunity to learn more about women's rights. She added, “Not only [was this] an opportunity to know more about our rights, but also [an opportunity to] witness the change in our personalities and to discover new things in life.” Salma attended a workshop in Jeddah last month about Saudi women rights in the workplace. “I learned the importance of equality from my involvement in different volunteering groups in the U.S.” Salma added.

Similarly, Latifah described her study abroad experience's role in enhancing her self-reliance skills. “Something I learned not to say while I was in the U.S. was ‘I don't know how to do this!’ If I don't know how to do it, I need to do some research about it and figure out how to do it,” Latifah said. She recounted the time she spent searching for an acceptance letter from a

well-known university. “My life in the U.S. made me more independent person. No one there to help you accept you.” After graduation from KASP, Latifah asked her father in Saudi Arabia to move to a house nearby, so that she could live alone. Her father agreed to move. She elaborated:

Here in Riyadh, I pay my own rent, pay for transportation, and pay my own bills without any help. I am opening my own business and things [are] improving day after day. I do my own laundry and cook for myself. It is more responsibilities, but this is like heaven to me.

Salma illustrate how meeting new people and making new friends gave her the chance to trust herself and be more self-reliant here in Saudi Arabia. “In the U.S., I created new friends in all major cities that I have visited. I built my own network and got to know many people; many of them added to my personality and I am following the same strategy here in Jeddah,” Salma said. She went on to observe the impact of these friendships in improving her chance to get a better job. “More friends, means more connections, and lead to a better job,” Salma added.

Ahmed, Sarah’s male chaperone in the U.S., observed that Sarah took advantage of the scholarship program more than many other Saudi females. According to him, Sarah's personality changed significantly from being a dependent person prior to joining KASP to becoming more independent after the study abroad experience. He stated that his sister took responsibility for everything while they were in the States. According to Ahmed, Sarah spent a lot of time to learn about other religions and cultures by attending different activities in Washington area; while he devoted his time to play soccer and party with his Saudi friends. “I didn’t get the chance to develop myself and my English language as much as she did,” Ahmed said. Sarah obtained her driver’s license four or five months before her brother obtained his license. Ahmed added, “She

was so determined to stay positive and learn something new every day and that what makes her a successful lawyer here in Saudi.”

“KASP for me was more than education and study experience. There in the U.S., I learned how to be fearless, how to solve problems and beat obstacles. There I became friend with people from Ukraine and Guatemala and many other countries,” Tahani said. During her work now in the foreign ministry, Tahani attended different conferences in Riyadh and met new people from different countries. Tahani relates her openness to other cultures to the experience she got while studying in the U.S., she explained about living in a diverse state like Ohio. She also mentioned the importance of her first year in Washington D.C., where she met different people on a daily basis in the public transportation system, and listened to their different political views. All of these self-reliance and cultural awareness actions in the U.S. made Tahani enjoy her job currently in the foreign ministry.

The artifact I collected also spoke to the participants’ self-confidence. Buthina became obsessed with cake designing while she was in the U.S. During our interview, she showed many pictures of her business products. She was very proud of her accomplishments. “I opened my business page on Instagram while I was in the U.S. and started selling my cakes five months after graduation,” Buthina said. She claimed that joining KASP gave her the opportunity to take business classes—classes that, in turn, facilitated the opening of her cake design business in Saudi Arabia. She also visited some Cleveland (Ohio) cake design shops and learned about cake design as a private business opportunity that she could bring back to Saudi Arabia. “I learned how to do naked cake in Cleveland and I learned the frosting too. I brought all the cake designing materials with me and started selling my products through Instagram,” Buthina said. As the interview ended—ever the confident marketer—Buthina gave me several business cards

to share with my friends.

Self-confidence, however, was a result of major challenges the Saudi women were able to overcome, as an artifact presented by Tahani said more about it. Tahani brought a picture of a Georgetown-area waterfront in Washington, D.C. “Without this place I couldn’t have done it,” Tahani said. She lost her mother while she was studying under KASP, and she faced many difficulties. Every time she went to this place, she cried, relaxed, and started planning for the rest of her life. The waterfront was her favorite place in the D.C. area to leave everything behind and take a moment with one’s self. She visited the waterfront frequently and even made some friends in the area. “There, I have some friends from Ukraine and Russia,” Tahani informed me, and she had not ever imagined knowing people from those countries,” she added

Impetus to Change

The third major theme emerging from analysis of the personal interviews was the impetus to change in participants’ lives, which resulted from exposure to new cultures and a new educational system. Participants used the word ‘transform’ more than eleven times during their interviews. Six participants described in detail how KASP transformed their lives and enhanced their leadership skills.

Ghada acknowledged that it is hard for people—no matter the gender—to go through an experience like KASP, and not to benefit from it or use it as a tool to transform their life conditions in positive ways. In the U.S., Ghada learned how to drive a car due to the delays in the Pennsylvania transportation system; she learned how to help newcomers from Saudi Arabia open bank accounts, apply for health insurance, and register their children in public schools. Ghada illustrated KASP’s transformative effect on her personality. Prior to her KASP participation, Ghada applied for a position at a hospital; the hospital rejected the application.

Post-participation and graduation, she applied again; the hospital hired her due to her expertise she gained from studying health management in Pennsylvania. Ghada explained more by saying: “KASP added to my skills and gave me the opportunity to be change maker in my community; if I can help new comers of course I can help people around me who needs to complete their education in the U.S.,” Ghada said.

Buthina agreed that after joining KASP, Saudi women are more committed and more loyal to the work environment than their male colleagues. She added that KASP provided the Saudi market with young, smart, and well-trained, educated women. Buthina believed that KASP and the transformational changes in her life and the lives of other Saudi women raised the competition between the two genders in the Saudi market. "I struggled a lot to find my current job, so many qualified Saudi females out there in the market applied to the same position, but I got the job," Buthina said. She confirmed, "My supervisor told me after he hired me that it was a close competition to fill the positions in the company between U.S. graduates and Australian university graduates." Dalia explained that KASP transformed her life and her résumé too. "My employer at the military hospital was amazed when he saw my resume including the high grades and the internship I did in the U.S.," Dalia said.

Lama was impressed with how KASP added to her life and the lives of other Saudi females. “If I can rate this program, I could give it 10 out of 10. It was a life transition for me and maybe my best decision in life so far,” Lama said. She believed that most Saudi women return to Saudi with strong leadership skills and an opportunity to transform their lives and their families’ lives, as well. She added that KASP benefits the entire country:

Now we have Saudi girls who are willing to rely on themselves, their abilities, and their skills. Young girls who know how to think, who know how to deal with their society

obstacles since they beat obstacles in a foreign one. They now know how to deal with males in the same society with more confidence and secure personalities. We have young girls who are well educated and professionals because they worked very hard to build themselves and say, 'We are here.'

Latifah saw the transformation of her personality during her studying under KASP from another angle. She admitted that she was more open to the changes in her life and was ready to transform her personality. She added that if one did not accept the transformation, one would never change. Latifah continued, "I went to the U.S. to change and improve myself before anything else." She spoke of how the U.S. life made her more of a 'do-er' by fixing things in the house and taking care of her car. Latifah described how joining KASP made her a great asset for her family and for the Saudi community. "The scholarship program flipped my life upside down, I was once regular employee, I am now the manager of human resource department in a big company," Latifah said. KASP helped her to see a new world, a different culture, and to learn new things. Latifah imagined a boring life without KASP by saying, "I would be an employee in one of the villages around Riyadh, married and have two kids. I would be living a very simple life with no big dreams," Latifah said.

Salma and Sarah agreed that living in the U.S. under KASP transformed their lives and enhanced their communication skills. Salma described the program's benefits, which included making her a change maker in her community. After graduation, Salma returned to Saudi Arabia and facilitated many workshops for females in high schools in Jeddah about the importance of studying abroad, finding themselves, developing their hobbies, and helping improve their families' financial status. Sarah explained KASP outcomes from her point of view. "KASP outcomes are clear; I see so many young Saudis finishing their studies in different countries. I

think we are going to do something great for this country,” Sarah said. Ahmed supported his sister, saying, “Sarah is a role model for many girls in the family now, and they all want to be like her independent and brave when they grow up.”

Reham’s husband, Khalid, reflected on how KASP transformed his wife’s personality and how such a program benefited her. “KASP benefited Reham a lot. It changed her thinking and attitudes; it was as if she became a new person after KASP. She can now speak her mind or disagree with family decisions and obligations,” Khalid said. He explained that his wife sees things differently than the rest of the family and he attributed the transformation in her personality to the fact that Reham lived outside Saudi Arabia for nearly a decade in her twenties. “She was removed of her comfort zone, and she proved to everyone that she is a responsible person that you can rely on,” Khalid said.

However, impetus for change also came with some exposure to the U.S. culture, as shown in the artifact Reham provided. Embracing U.S. culture, Reham brought a sport hat to the personal interview. She added this hat represents the Denver, Colorado, professional football team. Reham and her friends attended some Bronco games and she deeply enjoyed the experience. “I wasn’t sure what to bring as an artifact to the interview, and I remembered this hat. I don’t wear it a lot in here [Saudi],” Reham added. I asked, well, why this artifact in particular? She answered, “As you know, women here [in Saudi] are not allowed to attend sport events and I [had] never been to a stadium before.” Reham shared how studying abroad provided her with opportunities she did not have in Saudi Arabia. “I was told in my first week in the U.S. that America would teach me the real meaning of freedom and [that I would] do things I never experienced before,” she added. She was an outgoing person while she was in the U.S. She claimed that she did not like being on campus; this dislike decreased her involvement in

university student organizations.

Artifact analysis also showed women's further impetus to change. Lama arrived at the interview with a copy of her Ph.D. dissertation. When asked why she chose the dissertation as a meaningful artifact from her KASP experience, Lama answered, "Well, I am very proud of this research paper and it was the first pillar in planning my future." Lama worked hard in the U.S. to learn the fundamentals of a good research project. "In the U.S., I learned how to do good presentations and how to be great at it." Lama recounted the difficult times and the obstacles she experienced during the dissertation-writing process. She even criticized SACM by saying:

I was worried not to finish my PhD in time. SACM gives you only three years to finish your doctoral studies and that is not enough. I extended my scholarship three times (6 months each) and every time I had to send new letters from the school and new transcripts and new study plans. It was wasting of time and I sometimes worried about it more than my study.

Participant's Post-KASP Lives in Saudi Arabia

Research participants made significant adjustments to the American culture when they moved to the United States to study under KASP. Some participants struggled to re-adjust to their home culture after they completed KASP and returned to Saudi Arabia. Many participants described the changes KASP made in their professional and personal lives during personal interviews. These changes fell into four main themes: two related to professional lives, and two changes related to personal lives (see Figure 1).

Changes in Professional Lives

Five participants described how KASP experiences enhanced their professional work environments. "In the U.S. Lama grew professionally a lot. The kingdom created KASP as a

strategy to help Saudi Arabia become one of the world's top countries," Lama said. She claimed that many of her friends asked how she would adjust upon her return to the Saudi community. "Adjusting is a state of mind," she answered. "This is my country and I will stay here and help as much as I can. My love for Miami and the U.S. in general will not prevent me from participating to develop my country and its people," Lama said. Her research and volunteer experiences in the U.S. enhanced Lama's professional qualifications, such that Dar Al-Hikmah University, a well-known women's university in Saudi offered Lama a contract as a part-time assistant professor before she graduates from KASP.

Khalid indicated that the valuable opportunities offered by KASP helped his wife, Reham, professionally. "KASP graduates have good reputations in the Saudi job market, Reham got the job because of KASP, and because its graduates had studied in the world's top universities," Khalid said. "Reham now is doing a great job here in Saudi Arabia. She is working at one of the best colleges here in Jeddah. She is waiting to get a promotion next month and get a higher administrative position in the college," Khalid added. He noted that it was not easy for Reham to find a job immediately after graduation. "When we got back to Saudi Arabia it was tough to have a good job while the foreign workers are dominating the education sector in the country. Reham, as usual, did not give up and fought many battles to get the job she is doing now," Khalid said.

For two participants - Salma and Tahani- change had to do with their improved communication skills. "I learned many communication and team work skills while studying in the education college in the U.S. I have learned the skill of listening to people and learned from their experiences," Tahani reflected. Tahani said she went to the U.S. with less life experience in life, and returned to Saudi as a professional worker. She claimed that KASP exposed her to the

beauty of non-profit organizations. She wants Saudi Arabia to recognize this field and create more jobs in this field.

Salma also described how KASP enriched her communication abilities. She joined different volunteer groups in California and that helped her to learn how to communicate effectively with different audiences; Salma and Ghada created many connections in different places around the state. "KASP changed my way of thinking and taught me how important is to give from your time to make someone's day. All these things are helping me now in my current job. All these skills are supporting me every day in my private business here in Jeddah," Salma said. Similarly, Ghada talked about the importance of interacting with people and how making connections here in Saudi Arabia started back when she was a student under KASP. "In the U.S., I have learned how to trust myself more, make connections, and think ahead to shape my own future. I was my own leader," said Ghada.

Ahlam explained studying abroad improved her leadership skills and facilitated her professional success in the Saudi company that now employs her. Her participation in workshops, student organizations, and volunteer opportunities enhanced Ahlam's leadership style. "My manger in the company always appreciated my inputs during meetings and my supervisors are proud of me," Ahlam said. She added that KASP enriched both her financial management skills and her ability to increase the company's savings on its annual budget. "I taught my co-workers some professional skills in the excel program that I learned in my finance class when I was in the U.S.," Ahlam said.

Changes in Participants' Personal Lives

After graduating from KASP, eleven participants currently work in Saudi Arabia; most of them work in the private sector. Four participants described how studying abroad changed their

personal lives. They reflected on their sacrifices and recognized their efforts to prove themselves to their families and to the Saudi community. Dalia spoke of her post-KASP life experiences in Saudi Arabia: “When I return to Saudi, I felt the trust on me more. My family was like, ‘since you spent four years on your own then you can do whatever you want in the future.’ My personality has improved a lot from this study experience.”

Dalia revealed how KASP increased her self-understanding and being independent. “It took me a while to realize that the era of depending on our male relatives is gone and I have to step up and do something,” Dalia observed. “Now I see things in the world 180 degrees different. KASP experience opened my eyes to different cultures; to right and wrong, positive and negative; and to things [that] can hurt us and can improve us,” Dalia added. Abdullah confirmed that his daughter, Amal, is more confident now after KASP. “She is more independent now, she works in a private hospital, and always support the house financially,” he added. Participants commented frequently that KASP revealed their inner selves; hold them accountable for their behaviors, and the possibility to live their lives free from depending on their male relatives. Lama elaborated: “Lama before 2006 is totally different than Lama after 2016. I am more independent now. I am now fearless. I am helping myself and my family unconditionally.”

Zainah and Tahani spoke of how KASP boosted their personal lives. In response to the question, ‘what did KASP add to your personality?’ Zainah replied, “A lot. I am now the one making decisions in my life. I respect both my parents and I always listen to their point of view, but in the end, I do what I think is right.” She attributed these changes to her many years of life in the United States, because she had gained considerable experience in how to face daily problems there. She illustrated her point with the story of a man who asked for her father’s approval to marry her. Zainah refused the proposal because she was not ready to start a family.

She added, “I didn’t spend all these years in the U.S. to come home and get married. I want to help my family first and make them financially stable.” Tahani talked about how happy she is every month to give her father some money from her salary to support the family and its needs. “KASP gave me the opportunity to share the house responsibilities with my father,” Tahani said. She envisioned Saudi women’s lives a decade into the future, and emphasized, “I want them to have their unique personalities and be more independent. That is my own vision and that is what I need to see ten years from today.”

Enhanced fluency in English also enriched the personal lives of Buthina, Latifah, Salma, and Ahlama. During her residency in the U.S., Buthina struggled to learn English, so she devoted extra time to overcome the linguistic obstacle. She added, “Learning English language from native speakers helped me to improve my speaking skills. I use English daily in my work now in Saudi. Understanding another language helped me to gain more confidence.” Latifah and Salma shared how English fluency helped them obtain their current jobs. “During the job interview I had three months ago, my supervisor was surprised to see me speak correct English and show off my speaking skills,” Salma said. Latifah revealed that English language fluency is “a great asset in my résumé” and that put her ahead of her work colleagues.

Ahlam also spoke to the issue of how learning English helped her upon her return to Saudi Arabia after graduation. “I always take advantage of having such skill by talking to any foreigner in the country, either at work or in the supermarket,” Ahlam said. She talked about other Saudi graduates under KASP coming from different countries where their mother language is not English, such as Korea, Japan, Russia, and China. “The Saudi market will have many talents then and the job competition will be harder between Saudis,” Ahlam added. Ghada agreed

that KASP raised the competitiveness of the Saudi employment market. “Having variety talents and skills is good for the economy, good for the country, and good for the citizens,” Ghada said.

Adjusting to American culture and to other cultures inside the U.S. helped many participants raise their cultural awareness too. Lama indicated that learning about American cultures, traditions, and foods helped her to know more people, and increased her networking on and off campus. “KASP helped me see how people in other cultures live and deal with life obstacles,” Lama said. Salma mentioned that an American friend introduced her to the American culture and raised her cultural awareness. She said, "An American classmate introduced me to the American culture at a Thanksgiving celebration in his family's house. I learned a lot about the history of Thanksgiving, what Americans eat that day, and I answered many questions about the Saudi culture too,” Salma added.

Future of Female Leadership in Saudi Arabia and Vision 2030

I asked all research interview participants to share their perspectives about female leadership in Saudi Arabia now and ten years into the future. During the data-collecting stage of this research project, Saudi Arabia devised a plan to diversify its economy and develop all of the public sectors including health, education, infrastructure, tourism, and recreation by 2030. Based on my reading of the Vision 2030 goals, Saudi Arabia is working hard towards a new era of growth and leadership with comprehensive approaches to social and economic development. Hubbard and Kelly (2017) characterize Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 as unthinkable, where it will increase the number of Saudis (including women) employed in the private sector and increase foreign investment opportunities (Hubbard & Kelly, 2017).

Seven participants indicated that a growth in leadership opportunities for Saudi women is moving slowly for many reasons. “It is going to be a long road to improve the female leadership

in my country, but we are going to reach that point what so ever,” Buthina claimed. She asked the Saudi government to prioritize specific social improvements over the creation of additional leadership positions for women. She wants the government to allow women to drive cars and to enable Saudi women to do everything. “I would like to see the first Saudi female minister soon,” Buthina added. Dalia observed, starting the question about female leadership in Saudi Arabia by saying, “Change is moving slowly in here.” She expressed her disappointment in the slow process of giving women higher positions in public and private sectors:

I am sick of specific leadership roles that are only exclusive for men in my country. We need more female initiatives. It has been 12 years since the KASP started. I see minor changes in the community. People are more aware nowadays. I would like to see more females in the leadership positions in Saudi Arabia. I need female regular person in Saudi Arabia to reach a leadership position without favors or connections. I need women to find same opportunity as men in the workplaces.

Lama was more direct. “It is something invisible. I do not see female leadership here. Do you see it?” During the 13-month period of post-graduation experience, Lama visited more than three university campuses in the western region of Saudi Arabia; she saw clearly, how foreign teachers control the employment opportunities in those universities. “Without job opportunities, Saudi female leadership are just words,” Lama said. Salam agreed with such sentiments, stating, “Before we talk about female leadership ten years from today, let’s talk about the missing laws and rights that protect women inside the country.” Salma indicated that a clear constitution in the country to protect both genders is needed as soon as possible. “Whenever we have a clear constitution and clear written law and rights, then we are going to imagine something in the

future to improve female leadership here in Saudi. I would like people here to hear our voice and I want women to serve everywhere,” she added.

Latifah, however, noted that female leadership is a sensitive topic in Saudi Arabia. “There are few female leaders in Saudi Arabia because we (women) don’t accept failures,” Latifah said. She dreams of a country in 2030 where men and women work together to help build this country. To Latifah, leadership is not about gender; it is about teamwork. “We all need to feel the responsibility. It is more about where we are going to see our country ten years from today and what are we preparing for next generations,” Latifah said. She shared her vision for Saudi Arabia’s future by saying:

In 2030, I would like to see more efficient CEOs, no matter [the CEOs] gender. I would like this particular CEO to get the position without connections or get appointed because of a rich relative. I do not need companies to compliment females because they are females; I need them to hire them because they are well educated and more efficient. Of course, I do not like the idea of forbidding women to become ministers, but I need only the more qualified one to get this job. Back to the efficiency, leadership equals efficiency.

Ghada also shared her concern of a country that has never appointed a female minister. “It is shame to have zero female ministers in this country; we live in the twenty-first century,” Ghada said. She expressed her wish for a new Saudi Arabia with more female representatives in city halls and more businesswomen. Amal was more optimistic than the other participants.

“With the 2030 vision I am so optimistic. From now until that year, we will have more female leaders, we will have more Saudi females in every sector of this great nation,” Amal said. She insisted that change is happening even though it is slow, and many people are unaware of the change. Amal shared her predictions for the health sector in 2030. She dreams of more Saudi

female doctors, and more female leaders of the country's private hospitals. "I would love to see more equal opportunities between both genders not only in Saudi Arabia, but in all Arab countries," Amal added.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the effects of King Abdullah Scholarship Program on Saudi female students' leadership skills, as well as the program's transformative influence to their lives when they returned home: personal growth and appreciation for the opportunity, self-reliance and increased responsibility, and the impetus to change. Then, I described the changes in the participants' professional and personal lives post-KASP. I ended the chapter by demonstrating participants' future predictions to the female leadership in Saudi Arabia. Figure 5.1 summarized all themes that emerged from data analysis. In the next chapter, I will use analytical theory to discuss the study's findings.

CHAPTER SIX

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

Grounded theory (Charmaz, 2016; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to explore Saudi female students' personality changes while they were in the U.S. and after their return to Saudi Arabia. As indicated in Figure 6.1, the grounded theory approach helped explore Saudi female individuals' unique personalities without making assumptions about their experiences. It also helped focus on participants' perceptions and the meaning of their experiences (Charmaz, 2016). Using such a theory enabled the researcher to analyze every participants' words and glean meaning from the data through an inductive analytical process (Creswell, 2007).

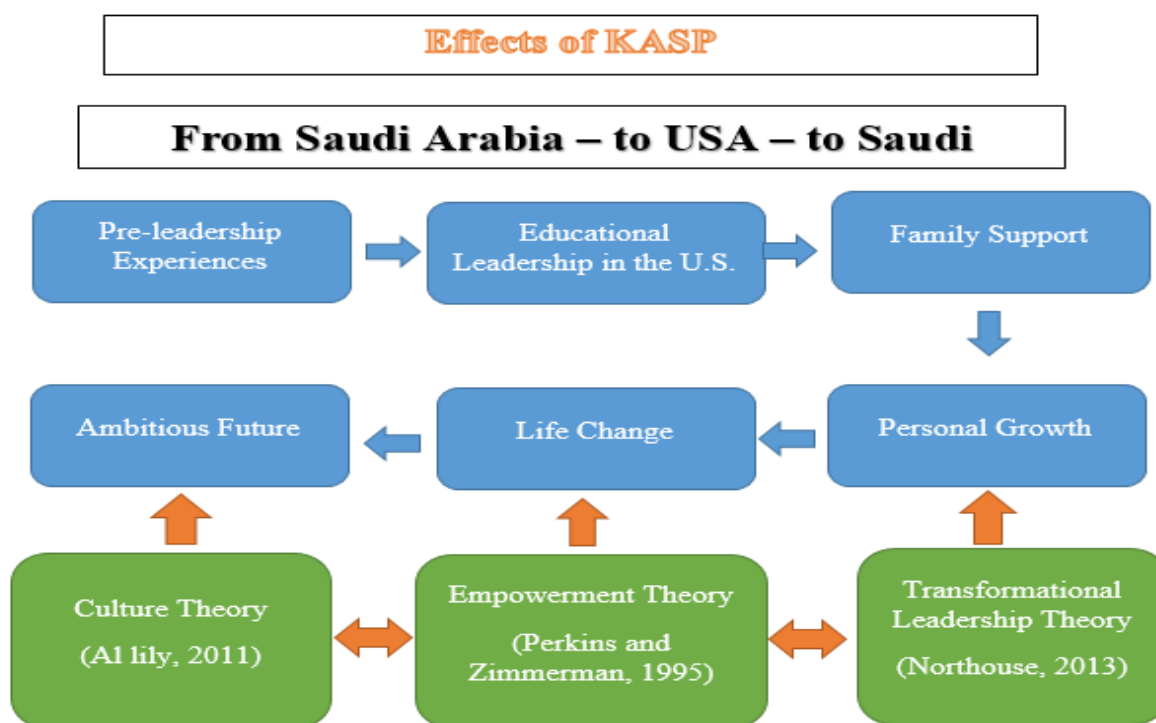


Figure 6.1. KASP's process of empowering Saudi females.

The theoretical frameworks used for this study played an important role in analyzing and understanding the effects of KASP on Saudi female students' leadership skills when they returned home after graduating from U.S. universities. In this chapter, I used three analytical

theories. Through the lens of Al Lily (2011) culture theory, I explored how the participants' leadership skills increased during their studies in America. Second, using Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) empowerment theory, I investigated how KASP empowers Saudi females and raises their expectation levels. Third, I used Northouse (2013) transformational leadership theory to examine ways in which KASP transformed participants' lives and enhanced their personalities.

Cultural Experiences

This study's findings revealed that participants struggled in their first months to adjust to American culture. They were excited to have the opportunity to study in the U.S., but were unaware of the cultural shock and the long adjustment process ahead of them. They discussed how having full responsibility for their futures kept them motivated and helped them adjust. Others were disappointed and considered canceling their scholarship for various circumstances such as illness or loss of a relative.

In addition, some participants talked about the significance of their families' emotional and financial support, especially during the participants' first six months in the U.S. Other participants talked about American and Saudi cultural similarities and differences. The participants revealed how they came to appreciate U.S. culture and its role in getting a high-quality education and raising the bar for their expectations. Some participants submitted that, as a result of staying in for years, they took some characteristics of American culture back home, and applied those characteristics in their Saudi lives.

Clifford Geertz (1973) defined culture as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (p.89). According to Hofstede (2013), any culture provides

moral standards about how to be an upstanding group member; it defines the group as a “moral circle.” Al Lily (2011), identified Saudi female cultural values as family honor, male-female division, veiling, male guardianship, and public/private divisions.

Discussion of Culture Theory

Some participants feared they might fail their U.S. studies and thereby affect their families’ honor inside their Saudi communities. According to Al Lily (2011), any Saudi female’s inappropriate action might harm the family’s reputation. The research participants found failure unacceptable. “Professors in my university were always encouraging me to do more and be a strong woman,” Buthina said. She explained how female professors in her university were role models in how to simultaneously beat daily life issues, take care of their families, and teach in a university. Buthina added, “They inspired me to complete my dream.” (Al Lily, 2011) stresses the importance of family honor. Latifah spoke of the family honor when she explained her story to join KASP:

My oldest brother tried to join the scholarship program three years before me, but he failed. It took him two years to provide the whole documents to the Ministry of Education, but he was too lazy to follow up with them. Maybe my father supported me because he was afraid to see one of his children fail again in studying abroad.

Gender does not segregate United States’ schools and public or private spaces. Rather, the U.S. separates church and state (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGroven, 2015). Some participants were shy in their first days in the English institute, and they expected this problem to last longer. The Saudi culture applies its gender separation system to all aspects of public and private sector (Al Lily, 2011). In the beginning, Ghada found it tough to adjust to the new U.S. classroom. “Coming from a conservative society I was too shy to talk to strangers that including my

classmates. After that, I defeated this obstacle and start conversations with other people. I gained strength from somewhere. Everything was normal after that,” Ghada said. Ahlam talked about her international male friends during the personal interview. She added, “I met people from Taiwan, and Malaysia for the first time in my life.”

Study participants highlighted how family support changed their lives. Their exposure to the U.S. culture called for adjustment, and relatives’ and friends’ support increased the participants’ confidence levels. Therefore, the participants’ lived experiences in the United States transformed their personalities. Furthermore, many participants mentioned that KASP experience and family support uplifted their motivations and enhanced their academic creativity when they were in the U.S., and upon their return to their home country (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009).

Family members’ support aided in participants’ adjustments to a new culture; most importantly, the support improved participants’ knowledge levels and cultural competency; this knowledge and competency helped participants interact effectively with American people from both genders. Living in a different culture helped participants see things from different angles and provided knowledge about new ideas that did not exist in Saudi culture. In turn, participants were able to share that knowledge in their own culture upon return to the country.

Many participants spoke powerfully about the significant role everyday interactions with people in schools, apartment buildings, and supermarkets played in easing the anxiety of culture shock. Participants found it very important to get involved in the new community. “Saudi women are generally hesitant to speak their minds due to the culture they were raised in, and that change in America,” Buthina said. In the U.S., Saudi females met people from different countries and backgrounds; they made lifetime friendships with them. Some participants came to appreciate American cultural diversity and connections with other international students

attending U.S. universities to improve their lives. Accordingly, many participants appreciated the difficulties in their first months in the U.S. because it inspired them to study hard and graduate from KASP.

According to Al Lily (2011), many daily activities of Saudi women require permission from their male guardians. These activities include having a job, attending universities, or traveling inside and outside the country. Many participants appreciated the opportunity to take full responsibility for their lives and making their own decisions while they were in the U.S. They explained how male guardianship system affected them negatively in Saudi Arabia and limited their job opportunities. “In the U.S., I learned how to take care of things and be independent. I learned how to be responsible and plan for my future,” Amal said. She talked about how her father used to do everything in Saudi to take care of her family and all that changed when she came to the U.S. “After living five years in the U.S. it looks like we can live without male guardianship; the Saudi government needs to do something about this,” Zainah added.

A majority of participants indicated they had no exposure to leadership opportunities prior to KASP. They blamed male-dominated culture of Saudi Arabia, as well as the nation’s educational system for the lack of leadership opportunities. Many Saudi men have more access to leadership positions than women, according to the participants. Findings in this study aligned with the literature regarding men’s primacy over women in Saudi Arabia. Rashwan (2015) indicates that Saudi culture considers men considered its ultimate and chosen leaders, whereas Saudi women are marginalized. Having no leadership experiences before coming to the U.S. delayed Saudi females’ adjustment process to the new culture. One participant, Reham, kept

mentioning how the absence of creativity and of teamwork activities in Saudi curriculum prevented her from keeping pace with other outstanding international students.

American classroom culture exposed participants to diversity and different learning strategies, which later had a great impact on them. According to Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGroven (2015), Saudi females in the U.S. enjoyed the culture's freedom, independence, and openness to diversity. Each participant lived in a different state such as Ohio, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Kansas, Virginia, Florida, and Connecticut. Each state had its own culture, people, and tourist sites. Some research participants also talked about their exposure to other cultures through their connections with other international students. International students' conversations led to a deeper understanding of one another's cultures, including cultural similarities.

KASP helped students exchange educational and cultural experiences with students from around the world. Studying abroad was a win-win situation for both Saudi female students and colleges. Saudi females increased their cultural competence. Colleges benefited from this diversity. For all participants, KASP was more about knowing the American culture and the American education system inside their colleges.

Since every culture has its own standards, many international students in the U.S. experienced cultural shock or "acculturation stress" (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGroven, 2015). Oberg (2006) noted that persons experiencing culture shock will take longer to adjust, because he/she might experience a lack of acceptance by members of the new culture. A few research participants mentioned cultural shock during the personal interview. "Every single day was difficult for me in the U.S., but I learned something new every day. I had a challenge every day to proof myself and reach my goal," Tahani confirmed.

According to the UK Council for International Students Affairs (2012), there are five stages of culture shock. First is the honeymoon stage, when the newcomer is happy to be in a new place; everything seems beautiful. Second is the distress stage, in which one feels isolated and recognizes key cultural differences between one's home culture and the new culture. Third is the reintegration stage, which occurs when the person rejects the differences between the two cultures. Fourth is the autonomy stage, in which the person starts to accept the differences. The last stage—independence—occurs when one begins to enjoy the new culture and feels able to make choices.

Empowerment Experiences

Participants in this study admitted to lifestyle changes after they graduated from KASP and returned home; they described this change as a recognition of their importance within their families and at their workplaces. For them, KASP provided Saudi females with better decision-making opportunities; KASP empowered them. Dalia was frustrated by male domination in the Saudi market. "I am sick of specific leadership roles that's only exclusive for men in my country," she added. Many participants had no experience dealing with basic life needs before they arrived in the U.S. However, they returned to Saudi Arabia well-empowered with new knowledge, academic experiences, and professional abilities. Dalia continued, "KASP was more than a study experience, I became a more matured person. I have changed. My eyes were opened to a new era of self-reliance."

Most research participants discovered their important role in developing their country and its economy. Nine participants lived in Saudi Arabia inside homes where their male relatives, usually fathers or brothers, took full responsibility the household needs, such as paying the rent, paying for utilities, and shopping for groceries. Some participants suffered when they traveled to

the U.S. because they had no experience completing such tasks. When Saudi males do not share the responsibility with their female relatives, the women rely on their male relatives, which might affect the family's economic circumstances. KASP provided Saudi females with an opportunity to be independent and to fulfill responsibilities typically considered a man's duty in Saudi culture. Living away from home prepared these females with the necessary skills to demonstrate their talents and prove themselves in the market. The experiences of studying abroad for many years, meeting new people every day, and graduating from the best schools, KASP participants were empowered to be the market's best candidates.

Some participants explained how studying in American universities changed their ways of thinking about educational institutions, encouraged them to join different student organizations on campus, and empowered them to be community change-makers when they returned to Saudi Arabia. The participants realized how U.S. educational institutions play a big role in prepare and empower young leaders by providing knowledge, training, and daily educational projects. Dalia admitted that the American education system was different and enjoyable, the research process was different and smooth, and the academic life there was unforgettable.

Discussion of Empowerment Theory

According to Perkins and Zimmerman (1995), empowerment theory is a construct that links individual abilities and strengths to help systems and enable proactive behaviors to lead to social change. Creating responsive communities and removing hurdles led to the creation of this theory (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). KASP is a rewarding program and one of its potential outcomes could be empowering women's participation in different areas of the Saudi society, family dynamics and workplace environments (al-Ahmadi, 2011).

Female Saudi leaders may also be challenged by disempowerment. This lack of power is reflected in women's inability to influence decision-making processes and achieve organizational goals (Metcalf 2011). Many participants interviewed in this study indicated how U.S. educational environment in colleges and universities contributed to their success as future leaders and to their eventual empowerment. They talked in detail about attributes of American education such as: healthy educational environments, updated curricula, supportive faculty and staff, and many involvement opportunities. According to Perkins and Zimmerman (1995), gaining access to resources is an important element of empowerment.

The aforementioned resources permitted many participants to use the word "independent" frequently in interview sessions. Participants lived their U.S. lives away from many obstacles in their home country, such as the male guardian system and being treated as subjects. Therefore, they took advantage of the KASP opportunity; they joined student organizations and volunteered to develop their self-esteem. Dalia confirmed: "After this experience I have proved to my family how to be an independent woman."

Some participants stated that joining campus student organizations and volunteering off-campus empowered them and enhanced their leadership and communication skills. In addition, participants also shared that such involvement helped them empower their female relatives when they returned home. They encouraged their relatives to take advantage of KASP and enjoy the experience of studying in the U.S.

Empowerment to Perkins and Zimmerman is about achieving goals, gaining access to resources, and understanding the basic components of the construct (1995). According to the participants, most U.S. universities they attended had a healthy environment where various activities and projects took place. The Universities' cultural, academic and sports organizations

facilitated the participants' overall growth. Joining organizations empowered and provided Saudi females with multiple and diverse opportunities to gain new skills or enhance existing abilities. All participants emphasized the importance of such engagement. Student organizations taught Saudi females how to work with teams, how to engage with diverse groups, and how to handle multiple responsibilities simultaneously.

Participants alluded repeatedly to the lack of student organizations in Saudi universities; some participants indicated that this lack contributed to Saudi women's unemployment. Most participants agreed that U.S. student organizations in the U.S. taught them teamwork, group engagement, and work skills and professional abilities. According to Perkins and Zimmerman (2015), empowerment outcomes for individuals involve participation in community, which might include sharing responsibility and leadership. Many research participants mentioned that KASP experience made them more open-minded and accepting of others' points of view. "Knowledge and living in a diverse culture would definitely make you open minded and will wide your way of thinking," Tahani agreed. Participants used KASP as an empowerment tool. They thought empowerment should always drive them to think of wellness versus illness, and strengths versus weaknesses (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

The participants' graduation from American universities made them look forward to higher standards of living, especially in the context of meeting Saudi Arabia's VISION 2030 goals. Regarding the empowerment of Saudi females in health sectors, Dalia wanted to see more Saudi female doctors lead hospitals and private practices. She dreamt of the day Saudi females would hold such leadership positions by merit rather than favoritism. According to Peterson (2014), Empowerment provide individual and groups with control over their lives and reduce marginalization in society. Other participants, such as Salma and Latifah, went so far as to

request that Saudi Arabia's Constitution empower women by granting their rights as educated humans and as effective contributors to the country economy. Empowerment can lead to strength (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Post-KASP, the research participants developed a positive attitude towards their role in the Saudi society. The participants believed in themselves and their abilities. They realized that KASP experiences enhanced their résumés as educated individuals who traveled overseas and graduated from high-ranking universities. They are now dreaming of a new Saudi Arabia by 2030, where they will play more leadership roles and have more opportunities to serve. The Saudi market recognizes KASP graduates as highly-educated individuals who are willing to learn and who acting as good team players.

Many years ago, some religious people insisted that Saudi women were not allowed to leave their homes, and that responsibilities should not exceeded taking care of the house and the children (Albalawi, 2013). King Faisal Bin Abdul-Aziz changed that, and established the first girls' school in Saudi Arabia in 1960 (Albalawi, 2013). He recognized female Saudi citizens' right to education. The research participants are continuing a battle that began more than 50 years ago. They traveled outside of their country to obtain a good education, and returned to engage in nation-building.

Transformational Experiences

KASP transformed participants' lives participants, added tremendously to their résumés, and allowed them to be compete in the Saudi job market. Participants spoke of KASP graduates' reputation as being potential employers' favorite candidates, compared to peers who graduated from Saudi universities. Others submitted that KASP experience met their expectations and developed their personalities. Some participants revealed that taking full responsibility for their

lives in the U.S., driving their own cars, and getting involved on their colleges campuses transformed their personalities and made them believe in their abilities.

Transformational leadership theory sheds some light on the empowerment Saudi women experienced because of their U.S. education and the KASP. According to Northouse (2010), transformational leaders have strong internal values and motives; they can effectively influence others' contributions to the group rather than simply to the individual. A transformational leader holds certain attributes such as personality, inspiration, and the ability to motivate and consider individual needs (Northouse, 2013). Likewise, some participants extended their empowerment so far as to influence their female relatives upon their return their graduation in the US. "I always encourage girls around me to go and study abroad. I always tell them, it is going to be tough in the beginning to adapt, but it is a big opportunity to develop yourself and see how people in other culture live and deal with life obstacles," Lama added. Some participants organized free workshops for high school students; others formed volunteer groups in their community to share how their experiences in the United Stated had empowered them.

KASP for participants was more about discovering themselves and learning how they handled responsibility. It was tough for some participants to live forever in the shadow of their male relatives. The participants crossed many oceans to finish their education, to learn how to make their own life decisions, and succeed in both missions. Since they had great memories, learned new skills, and enjoyed freedom of choice, they wanted their female relatives to live the same experience. It was very important to some emphasize the importance of empowering their female relatives and encouraging them to join KASP.

Discussion of Transformational Leadership Theory

According to Northouse (2013), transformational leadership changes people's lives, changes their expectations, and establishes them as role models. The Saudi government is focusing on Saudi females' education, because the government believes that education can transform lives. According to the Ministry of Education (MOE) website, 58% of Saudi students in the country's universities and schools are female, and the number is increasing year after year (MOE, 2018). Only 22% of the Saudi workforce, on the other hand, is female (MOE, 2018).

KASP provided Saudi females with an opportunity to reduce this gap. KASP helped some Saudi females open their own business based on the knowledge they gained abroad. It also helped them to think outside the box, see a new world, different cultures, and learn new things. Some participants were inspirational motivation to females in Saudi Arabia. Transformational leaders have vision and can develop their personalities regularly; this study's participants developed their visions and personalities while they were in the U.S. (Taleb, 2010).

According to the Ministry of Education, (2018) the main goal of the KASP is to sponsor qualified Saudis for study in the best universities around the world, to transform their personalities, and to prepare them to compete in the market. The Saudi government believed in educating Saudi youth outside the kingdom. They knew such a step would be a good asset to the Saudi economy in the upcoming years. During the data collection phase of this research, ten participants recalled that the Saudi education system did not expose them to leadership opportunities. Some complained about the discouragement they got from their teachers and the schools' absence of extracurricular activities. In their opinion, Saudi education placed excessive emphasis on general subjects like Arabic and Islamic studies while excluding subjects that helped them innovate or discover new things.

Transforming Saudi females' lives would help expand qualified and professional Saudi staff in the workplace and set them as role models. In 2014, MOE established a program with the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to train fresh Saudi graduates—both males and females—and provide them with internship opportunities. They assisted helped new graduates find internship opportunity in their fields of study. Providing such real-world experiences to qualifying students will help the students compete successfully in the Saudi market and in their chosen professions. In the same regard, SACM partnered with more than 40 U.S. companies—such as Boeing and Intel—to accept Saudi students in a one-year internship program before the graduates returned home to join the Saudi workforce. The internship program will expose Saudi graduates to work environment problems and issues that are not found in the textbooks (SACM, 2018).

All research participants are now working in Saudi Arabia, except Lama. She left the job as an assistant professor in a private school in Jeddah and is searching for a better opportunity. Other participants agreed that KASP transformed their carriers and helped them get high positions in the Saudi market. Dalia, for example, is working in the quality and safety department of a well-known Riyadh hospital. Buthina is working both as a consultant and as a member of the organization development and talent management team in the International Catering Corporation; she is also the CEO of her cake design company. Ghada is a pharmacist in a private hospital, Sarah is a lawyer, and Reham is an assistant professor of educational technology at a local Saudi university.

A real transformational leader influences and motivates followers (Northouse, 2013). As KASP graduates of both genders return to Saudi Arabia with high professional standards and a high-quality education, the Saudi market will improve and the competition with foreign workers will rise. According to the MOE evaluation of KASP program in 2015, the Saudi government

allocated 210 billion Saudi Riyal to support KASP over a five-year period (MOE, 2018). The Saudi government believes that KASP is supplying qualified human resources to the Saudi market year after year. This belief in taking their citizens' skills to the next level is powerful and a win-win situation for the Saudi market and for these students' lives. KASP also raises the female students' expectations and makes them work hard to be successful in their experience.

Some participants mentioned that KASP changed the Saudi society point of view about education's role in transforming lives. People in Saudi Arabia were not aware of the importance of KASP in transforming beneficiaries' lives. They thought that education was going to be the same both inside and outside the kingdom. They did not consider the other elements that affect the study abroad experience, such as new cultural experiences, career opportunities, finding new interests, making new friends, and developing personally. The research participants repeated how their families and employers noticed the changes in the women's personalities after studying abroad. They were more professional, on time, and always bringing new perspectives to the meetings. Many Saudi employers have a positive view of KASP because it is able to generate educated and skilled members of Saudi society (Hilal, Scott & Maadad, 2015).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I used three overarching theoretical frameworks to analyze the findings that emerged from the data analysis. Those conceptual frameworks included Al Lily' (2011) culture theory, which explained how the participants' time in American culture raised their leadership skills, and how they overcame the challenges of culture shock. I also used Perkins' and Zimmerman's (1995) empowerment theory to understand how KASP empowered Saudi females by raising their individual, academic, and professional worth. Finally, I utilized transformational leadership as viewed by Northouse (2013) to examine how KASP transformed

the lives of the participants and added to their personalities. In the next chapter, I summarize this study, discuss some implications and provide recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER SEVEN

STUDY SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to investigate how the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) enhanced Saudi female students' leadership skills while they studied in the U.S. and when they returned home after graduation. My research participants gave voice to their leadership experiences and the effects of these experiences on their personalities. The grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2016) from the qualitative tradition provided the twelve Saudi females and the three male chaperones who participated in this study the opportunity to share their voices regarding the leadership skills the Saudi females gained while they studied under KASP. In this chapter, I summarize the study, draw some implications from the research findings; and make recommendations. I end the study with a general conclusion.

Study Summary

In this study, I collected data from fifteen research participants: twelve Saudi female students studied under KASP and three male chaperones. I used two qualitative research inquiry methods: narrative inquiry and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2016; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and utilized in-depth one-on-one interviews and artifacts for data collection. I relied on convenient sampling (Creswell, 2016) to gather study participants. Participants met three criteria for selection: they were Saudi female students who received the KASP, lived in the U.S. for more than two years, and lived in Saudi Arabia after graduation for more than one year. I used grounded theory as the overarching theory in this research (Charmaz, 2016). As required by narrative inquiry, all participants produced rich data for the study. Data constituted in-depth interviews and collection of artifacts to ensure study triangulation. After transcribing the data, I

read data several time to create summaries and label codes. I analyzed the codes line-by-line, grouped them in categories and identified emergent themes.

Findings in chapter four revealed three themes. The first theme was pre-KASP leadership experiences of Saudi females. Participants shared their Saudi education system experiences and how such a system did not expose them to leadership skills or opportunities. The second theme was experience and perception of leadership in the U.S. The participants narrated their leadership experiences on and off campus in American universities. The third theme was family members as support resources for participants. Participants gave credit to their families back home in Saudi Arabia for supporting them emotionally and financially.

The participants shared their stories and memories of studying in Saudi high schools and colleges. They were not satisfied with the educational system and its deficiencies in preparing future leaders. Some participants talked about the excessive emphasis on general subjects such as Islamic and Arabic language studies. The participants talked about the lack of extra-curricular activities and the absence of creativity and innovation in their daily Saudi school routine. Other participants shared their concern about the scarcity of great teachers who had enough experience to changes their lives for the better.

Besides the participants' experiences prior to joining KASP, they talked about the experience of studying in the United States, and how that experience transformed their lives. Participants addressed the healthy education environment in the U.S.—from fun classes to the great support they received from their professors in American colleges. Some mentioned that life inside campus libraries encouraged them to study more, and incentivized them to move forward. Many participants mentioned three important leadership traits they discovered while they were in the U.S. Participants learned leadership skills from joining student organizations on and off

campus, from dealing with daily problems they witnessed, and from enhancing their bicultural and cross-cultural experiences. Participants recounted that their family members supported them during their time in the U.S. Some participants declared that they would not have graduated under KASP without such personal, emotional and financial support. However, the lack of family support affected some Saudi females negatively, especially those who traveled alone and found themselves in a new culture, speaking a new language, and feeling homesick. According to Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGroven (2015), social and family support are important variables in adjusting to a new culture and avoiding any acculturation stress.

Many participants blamed male domination in the country for their own lack of leadership skills. Nine participants felt powerless, even in their own homes, because their male relatives held all household responsibilities such as buying groceries, paying monthly utility bills, and making daily decisions without the participants' input. To the participants, KASP empowered them when they lived in a foreign country and found it necessary to make their own life decisions. To them, empowerment identified their capabilities and helped them reach greater outcomes and results (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

From the findings regarding the transformational effects of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program on Saudi female students' leadership skills lives after graduation, I again derived three themes in chapter five. The first theme was about how KASP added to Saudi females' leadership skills. This theme included three sub-themes which are:

- Personal growth and appreciation for the opportunity where the participants appreciate the opportunity of studying abroad and growing personally.
- Self-confidence and a sense of responsibility, wherein participants talked about their experiences of being independent in the U.S.

- The impetus for change the participants experienced. Some participants described in detail how KASP transformed their lives and enhanced their leadership skills.

The second theme was about how KASP added to participants' professional and personal lives. Many participants described the changes KASP made in their professional lives by providing the Saudi market with more professional workers with leadership and communication skills. KASP also enhanced some participants' personal lives by teaching them proficiency in English, self-reliance, financial responsibility, and cultural awareness. According to Peterson (2014), empowerment can lead to social change and economic justice in any culture, and that is exactly what happened to the research participants.

The third theme was about the future of female leadership in Saudi Arabia with the 2030 vision. Many participants were optimistic of the future of female leadership with the new vision and believed Saudi female leadership will expand with the new promises of the government and its quick steps to economy prosperity. Most of the participants are dreaming of a new Saudi Arabia with no guardianship laws and more leadership opportunities to them.

Chapter six discussed the theoretical frameworks that I derived from data. Those three frameworks included Al Lily's (2011) culture theory to understand how participants explained their time in the U.S. and how it raised their leadership skills. Then I used Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) empowerment theory to understand how KASP empowered Saudi females and prepared them for the Saudi market. Finally, I utilized transformational leadership as viewed by Northouse (2013) to examine how KASP transformed participants' lives, added to their personalities and made them role models in the eyes of many female relatives around them.

Implications of the Study

This study implies that KASP has revolutionized the education and the responsibility that women should uphold in Saudi society. First, KASP provided participants with more than a certificate and a job when they returned home. Those Saudi female students took advantage of the KASP opportunity and returned home with enhanced abilities to make decisions, create initiatives, assist their families financially, and grow professionally. For most participants, KASP was a wake-up call—one that reminded them of their importance in building their country's economy and creating their own opportunities.

Second, because of this study abroad opportunity and role of KASP, it is safe to imply that the number of Saudi female leaders is growing every day in the country. Because of KASP, we see Saudi females in different sectors working hard to prove themselves and participate in their nation's prosperity. They are in the medical, law, politics, media, education, and business fields. The country needs more female leaders, since they are better educated than men in Saudi Arabia according to MOE (2018). Being more educated means new energy to ignite the growth of their work environments.

Third, the study also implies that in spite of challenges, Saudi women are resilient and ready to embrace societal change. Some challenges participants faced in the U.S.—taking additional time to learn the English language, missing family members, or dealing with the SACM's continuous orders for documents—actually motivated participants to continue their study abroad dream. Some participants became role models inside their families and in their small communities. Girls in Saudi high schools now dream of following participants' steps and studying abroad. Once back home in Saudi Arabia, some participants helped their relatives apply

to foreign universities and spent quite a time talking about their own experiences and how the study abroad experience transformed their lives.

Fourth, the fact that study participants held leadership positions upon their return to Saudi Arabia implies that Saudi society is also embracing change to its previously-held culture of excluding women from leadership positions. Vision 2030 for Saudi Arabia has increasing women's workforce as a major. The research participants gained many professional work skills by obtaining high-quality education and joining informative classes in their American universities. In addition, some participants learned about other cultures, religions, and ways of thinking for people who share the globe with them.

In sum the overall implication of the study is that, KASP has changed the educational, cultural, and leadership landscape of the females who have benefited from it and of the Saudi society as a whole.

Recommendations

Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia

It behooves the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia to keep sending young Saudi females to study internationally. According to the research findings, the KASP is highly effective for many reasons. First, it provides young Saudi females with different opportunities to discover themselves and know how to live independently, make their own decisions, and improve their personalities. Educating females is very important in not only Saudi Arabia, but also all over the world. Female education passed through stages of failure in the 60's and 70's; in those days, Saudi communities discriminated against the education of girls. However, there is an African proverb that says, "If you educate a man, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate a nation."

Second, KASP was more than an education experience abroad. Rather, for most participants KASP was an opportunity to find themselves, improve their communication and leadership skills, and to inaugurate a new era in their lives. Behind every Saudi female who studied overseas, there is a story. Those stories have tears, sweat, and happy moments too. The Ministry of Education needs to organize a yearly conference with these female graduates to listen to their experiences, honor outstanding female students, evaluate the whole program and encourage more women to benefit from it.

Third, KASP graduates will raise the competition inside the Saudi market, which has a high percentage of foreigners. According to Alotaibi (2014), in his dissertation, *Opportunities and Barriers to Collaboration in Addressing Unemployment in Saudi Arabia*, non-Saudi workers represent 47.26% of Saudi Arabia's workforce. In addition, according to the World Bank (2017), Saudi Arabia ranks second after the United States as the highest expatriate destination country. Having a study abroad experience says a lot about KASP graduates' résumés. Not only does it highlight the ability to speak another language or the ability to adopt to another culture, but also one's ability to adopt to a new environment and do more to self, family, and country. MOE should continue sending more Saudi females to study abroad to keep the competition inside the Saudi market between the two genders.

Fourth, the Ministry of Education needs to develop Saudi universities for both genders. It is important to have digital facilities, great teachers' attitudes, and creative teaching methods. It is equally worthwhile to provide female students with different opportunities to visit local companies and respond to the job market's expectations. KASP is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and it might not happen again in the near future. Saudi females need to get a good education in order to participate more in their country's prosperity and find jobs where they can

improve their families and surrounded communities. According to the General Authority for Statistics (n.d.), in 2012, Saudi women represented 32% of the unemployed in Saudi Arabia, compared to 6.1% for men. Unemployment for women continued to rise in 2013, reaching 34% (Jiffry, 2014).

Fifth, it is crucial for new KASP students to meet with graduates from the same program and listen to their study-abroad stories. Those meetings are very helpful and it will ease the fear from studying abroad to new students. MOE needs to focus more on providing workshops for a week or two about the studying abroad experience and what Saudi Arabia and its people expect from those students in the future. These pre-KASP workshops needs to be informative, teach new students in the program about the culture they are going to study in, how to communicate with people there, how to take advantage of the opportunity, what are their academic duties, and how can they survive the cultural shock. Graduate with experience might deliver this information in presentations to new students joining KASP and MOE can include it in the pre-KASP workshop week. Having pre-departure workshops will help newly-admitted female students to know what to expect before they to study in a foreign country.

Sixth, MOE is responsible to monitor the work of Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Washington D.C. and Saudi cultural missions around the world. Five participants in this research mentioned the difficulties they have with SACM. Such difficulties included, for example, unanswered phone calls, delayed communication, lack of flexibility, and repetitive requests for female students to provide proof of having a live-in male chaperone. SACM is an organization that is supposed to support KASP, rather than to provoke them and add to their academic and social struggles in a foreign country. Since MOE oversees and supervises SACM, MOE needs to ensure that all SACM employees collaborate with Saudi students and assist them as needed.

Recommendations for Saudi Female Students under KASP

Before leaving Saudi Arabia, newly-admitted female students to KASP need to receive as much information as possible about American culture and how to take advantage of the study abroad opportunity. They can meet with KASP female graduates from the same major, ask them about their experiences, and what they regret not doing while they were in the United States. Newly-admitted Saudi females to KASP need to join any support groups in Saudi Arabia or online and learn about life in America, how to rent an apartment, how to pay the bills, how to get advantage from the university facilities, and how to build their personalities and enhance their leadership and communication skills. Newly-admitted female students to KASP need to prepare as much as they can for this next phase in their lives. The more they are prepared and informed about the study abroad experience, the faster they can adjust to the new culture and beat their daily obstacles easily.

Some Saudi female students who are already in the U.S. know how some people back home envy them for getting such an opportunity, and it is not a surprise to learn that some of those people are waiting for the students to fail. Some people in Saudi Arabia do not support KASP at all; some think KASP was launched to only support Saudi male students;, and some of them do not believe females can live independently and succeed. Saudi female students who study overseas should not give such people the chance to celebrate their failure. It is going to be a hard mission, but not impossible. Every family back home believes in their female students who are studying in a foreign country and mapping their future.

Newly-admitted female students to KASP should plan their trips ahead, identify annual goals, work hard, and they will be satisfied with the results. They need to learn to ask for help and assistance. Many students graduate from their universities without paying attention to or

taking advantage of campus services and resources. Many free activities and services on and off campus might change these students' lives forever. Newly-admitted female students to KASP should not stay at home all the time when they study overseas. They need to meet new people, build friendships and expand their networks. They also need to remember to study hard during academic semesters, and travel in their free time as a self-reward. While they are away studying and living in another country, they might think about their future business like Buthina, follow their dream of being a female lawyer like Sarah, support their family financially like Dalia, make KASP opportunity a life transition like Lama, and dream about opening their non-profit organization like Tahani.

Finally, the scholarship opportunity does not come twice in life and taking full advantage of this opportunity is highly recommended. We live in an era where education for traditional household work is not as popular as it used to be. We live in a world where we see females work as engineers, doctors, pilots, and scientists. KASP enlightened the research participants. Improving their personality and enhancing their skills were the highlights of their experiences in the U.S. Saudi Arabia needs all its citizens to help in the upcoming years to achieve the nation's 2030 Vision goals. Readjusting to post-KASP life in Saudi Arabia very important too. These students need to take all the habits and ideas that improved them, their families, and their communities. Talking to people, old and young, about everything that happened to these students abroad is very important too. Those stories might be someone's first push to do the same in the future.

Recommendation for Future Studies

This study has indicated the necessity to conduct further research on the leadership advancement of Saudi female students in education and other institutions. Research can also

investigate how KASP affected Saudi families' economic and financial status when their sons and daughters graduate from the program and return to Saudi Arabia. One could also conduct a study on how KASP stirs a competition among Saudi universities to recruit more students and keep up with many advanced international universities. My study focused mainly on how KASP played a role in enhancing Saudi female students' leadership skills. Another research can study the whole KASP program from its inception 2005 to 2020 and examine its outcomes. Another one could study the differences in KASP graduates returning to Saudi Arabia according to what country they were in. My recommendations are intended to keep KASP effective, and to seek further opportunities to educate more Saudi female leaders. I feel privileged to have spent over eighteen hours listening to these students talking about KASP. Since my research was of a qualitative nature, I recommend another investigation that could use quantitative methods and involve more subjects in order to generate results that are more generalizable.

Conclusion

My study contributes to the literature regarding the experiences and perceptions of Saudi female students who studied abroad in the U.S. It also adds to the body of knowledge on the students' adaptations and personality changes in a new culture and their readjustment process in their post-KASP lives in Saudi Arabia. Few studies discuss the KASP's outcomes. There are no studies on whether or not KASP really affects Saudi student lives after graduation, and if the program meets the desired expectations in the thirteen years since the program began. The surge in Saudi females pursuing education in the United States has not been researched. There has never been a qualitative study that focused specifically on the exploration of Saudi female leadership under the KASP.

The focus of my study was in the leadership experiences and skills of Saudi females in the U.S. and how KASP enhanced those skills and transformed their personalities. Future studies could focus on Saudi male students and see how KASP added to their personalities and leadership skills. The finding of this study may provide knowledge to help address issues affecting Saudi female students who study abroad. Moreover, this study provides useful insights and recommendations to current female students who are studying away from home, as well as for prospective female Saudi students who plan to join KASP in the near future.

In this study, I investigated how KASP enhanced Saudi female students' leadership skills while they studied in the U.S. and when they returned home upon their graduation. I listened to many stories from those female students and was able to obtain relevant data from those stories of struggle and ambition. Overall, if any country needs problem-solving, self-aware leaders and professionals who are open to diversity, the country needs to invest in educating its youth. Because of KASP, Saudi females are not going to be underrepresented in many organizations in both public and private sectors.

The data in this study has been shared from twelve Saudi female students and three of their male chaperones. I used open-ended questions to get more in-depth answers. I learned a great deal by listening to such stories. The opportunity to join KASP inspired those students to become change-makers once they returned home. The transformations in their lives happened while they were away from home, joining a new culture, trying to prove themselves, and trusting their abilities.

Finally, I have come to learn that Saudi females are much stronger and successful while away from home than I anticipated. They work very hard to enhance their talents and skills. They understood deeply the difficulties of surviving in a male-dominated market, such that women are

not afforded the same opportunities as men to hold higher positions. Successful stories of Saudi females in this research will be a wake-up call for any other Saudi females who underestimate their own abilities.

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Appendix A

Personal Interview Questions

12 general and open-ended questions for female participants:

1. Tell me about yourself?
2. Could you please tell me about your educational experience before joining the KASP?
3. How did you get the scholarship and what did you imagine your life in the US will look like?
4. Tell me about your family members' feelings when you got the scholarship?
5. How was your experience studying in the US in general?
6. What do you think the KASP added to your personality?
7. What have you learned in the US that add to your leadership personality?
8. What skills have you learned in the US that helped you here in Saudi Arabia?
9. Do you think that KASP benefited Saudi female students? If so how?
10. How do you describe female leadership in Saudi Arabia?
11. Where do you see female leadership in Saudi Arabia ten years from today?
12. Do you like to add things before we wrap up this conversations?

5 general and open-ended questions for male chaperones:

1. Tell me about (female participant's name) personality before and after King Abdullah Scholarship Program experience?
2. In what way does the family support (female participant's name) decision to complete her education abroad?
3. Has (female participant's name) talked to you about how KASP and the study abroad experience affected her life, if so what did she say?

4. Tell me about a time where (female participant's name) solved a problem in the United States?
5. Where do you see (female participant's name) 10 years from today?

Appendix B

IRB Letter of Research Approval

IRB - UNIVERSITY OF ST-THOMAS

Date: February 28, 2017

To: Magied Alsqoor

From: Sarah Muenster-Blakley, Institutional Review Board

Project Title: [1005237-1] How has King Abdullah Scholarship Program Enhanced the Leadership Skills of Saudi Females Beneficiaries?

Reference: New Project

Action: Project Approved

Approval Date: February 28, 2017

Expiration: February 27, 2018

Dear Magied:

I have read your protocol and approved your project as reflected in the modifications that you submitted. Please note that all research conducted in connection with this project title must be done in accordance with this approved submission.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and assurance that the project is understood by the participants and their signing of the approved consent form. The informed consent process must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between you and your research participants. Federal law requires that each person participating in this study receive a copy of the consent form. All research records relating to participant consent must be retained for a minimum of three years after completion of the project.

Amendments or changes to the procedures approved by the IRB must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to your making changes to your research study. No changes may be made without IRB approval except to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the participant.

Any unanticipated problems involving risks or harm to project participants or others must be reported to the IRB within one business day of the Principal Investigator's knowledge of the problem. Any non-compliance issues or complaints relating to the project must be reported immediately.

Approval to work with human subjects in connection with this project will expire on February 27, 2018. This project requires continuing review on an annual basis. Documentation for continuing review must be received at least two weeks prior to the expiration date of February 27, 2018.

Please direct questions at any time to Sarah Muenster-Blakley at (651) 962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu. I wish you success with your project!

Sincerely,

Sarah Muenster-Blakley, M.A.

Director, Institutional Review Board

Appendix C

Consent Form

[1005237-1] How has King Abdullah Scholarship Program Enhanced the Leadership Skills of Saudi Female Beneficiaries?

You are invited to participate in a research study about the impact of King Abdullah Scholarship Program on the leadership skills of Saudi females' beneficiaries. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you were a female beneficiary of the KASP in the United States. You are eligible to participate in this study because you spent more than two years in the United States and you have been in Saudi Arabia for more than a year. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not you would like to participate. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Magied Alsqoor, research advisors Dr. Jean-Pierre Bongila from Department of Leadership - College of Education, Leadership and Counseling at University of Saint Thomas, MN. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of King Abdullah Scholarship Program, and how such a program affects the leadership skills of Saudi females who formerly studied in the United States and are now back in Saudi Arabia, and whether it might have changed their social status, and whether it might have propelled them leadership positions in their country.

Research Questions:

- * How has King Abdullah Scholarship Program shaped the lives of women who've benefitted from it?
- * How has an education outside Saudi Arabia contributed to preparing future female leaders in that country?
- * How do participants in this study perceive leadership roles as a consequence of their education in the United States?

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: You will be asked to participate in an in-depth one-on-one interview that will last approximately 60-90 minutes at a location of the participant's choosing. You will be asked to describe your study abroad experience and how KASP has enhanced your leadership skills and added to your personality. You will be asked about your life before and after KASP and how do you foresee the future of female leadership in Saudi Arabia.

In addition to the interviews, I will request that you bring any artifacts (photo, article, or any souvenir) that remind you of your study abroad experience in the United States. You will explain what the artifact has meant to you as a beneficiary of KASP. Participation in all of these activities is voluntary and you may choose to participate in all or in just some of these activities depending on your comfort level. I will be audiotaping the whole interview and might send you some follow up questions in the near future to clarify any answers. I will also request your permission to use some of your artifacts in my data analysis and the finding of the study.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

- The risk of your participation in this study is that your experiences and your perception of those experiences will be available to anyone who reads the dissertation.

- As woman speaking to a man in the cultural contexts of Saudi Arabia, you may also feel some discomfort, but the presence of your chaperone – although not participating in the study – should help to ease the discomfort. Additionally, I will provide some brainstorming activities that will set you in the mood of responding without reservation to the questions.
- Identification of your names, and your whereabouts as well as that of your immediate family members may cause you to be subject to “cultural” and “traditional” harassments. However, in order to minimize this risk, your name will be withheld, and pseudonyms will be used.

Compensation

Participation in this study is voluntary. Monetary compensation will not be available.

Privacy

Your personal identity and privacy will be protected as will the identity of your job position.

Although I will know your identity, no one other than my college supervisor will be privy to the information. Your name and the name of your family will not be identified during the study or as part of my dissertation.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include audio recordings, transcripts, artifacts, and computer records, all of which will be kept in a locked and secure location. I will be the sole holder of my computer password, and of the key of my locker. As the only transcriber, I will be the only individual with access to data

and the only one that is able to identify you as an individual participant. All materials collected and developed during this research will be destroyed upon the completion of the dissertation.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision to whether or not participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until March 1, 2018. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will not be used in the dissertation. You are also free to skip any questions asked during the interview process.

Contacts and Questions:

Contacts and Questions. You may contact any of the resources listed below with questions or concerns about the study.

Researcher name	Magied Alsqoor
Researcher email	malsqoor@stthomas.edu
Researcher phone	001320-31-7283 or 0531625759
Research Advisor name	Dr. Jean-Pierre Bongila
Research Advisor email	jpbongila@stthomas.edu
Research Advisor phone	651-962-4799
UST IRB Office	651.962.6035

You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu with any questions or concerns.

Statement of Consent

I have had a conversation with the researcher about this study and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I give permission to be audio recorded during this study.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Print Name of Study Participant

__Magied Alsqoor__

____01/31/2017____

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix D

Names	Major	Degree	State	Years spent in US	Years in S.A. Post KASP	Current Position
Amal	Biology	Bachelor	Kansas	5	2	Works in a Private Hospital
Buthina	Curriculum and instructions	Master	Ohio	3	2	Consultant + CEO of a family business
Sarah	Law (LLM)	Master	District of Columbia	3	3	Lawyer
Tahani	Non-profit organizations administration	Master	Ohio	3	2	Works in the foreign Ministry
Salma	Industrial organizational development.	Bachelor	Connecticut	4.5	2	T.V. producer

Reham	Educational Technology	Doctorate	Colorado	7	2	Assistant professor
Ghada	Health Management	Master	Pennsylvania	3	1	Pharmacist
Dalia	Health Administration	Master	Virginia	3	2	Consultant in the health care quality department in the military hospital
Latifah	Education - Applied Behavior Analysis	Master	Ohio	3	3	Manager of a human resource department
Lama	Conflict analysis and resolution	Doctorate	Florida	10	1	Unemployed
Ahlam	Business Administration	Bachelor	Arizona	5	1	Works in a Saudi Company
Zainah	Special Education	Bachelor	Utah	5	2	Teacher in a private Autism school

Table 5.1: Table with personal interviews participants' data.