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## INSIGHTS INTO THE ASSESSMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE OF FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE KSA

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to introduce some partial findings of an ongoing research project which is investigating the improvement of intercultural competence of Saudi female university students in English as a Second Language in the academic environment of the multicultural Jazan University. Since previous research results support the idea that this university generation has the desire to become interculturally or globally competent university students, the present-day investigation is focusing on the assessment of Saudi-specific cultural issues and intercultural competence components in comparison with the Anglo-Saxon oriented western perspective of intercultural competence approaches. On this stage of the research quantitative research methodology was applied, and a survey was being conducted among the female university students in different academic specializations. This paper discusses some empirical data with the aim of identifying and evaluating certain supplementary aspects of intercultural dimensions and components of the intercultural competence construct. The research results also highlight several gender issues in the gender separated higher education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

**Keywords:** gender separation, globally competent university student, intercultural competence, higher education.

**Introduction:** Education of female Saudi citizens has been a crucial and contradictory socio-political, economic, educational and cultural policy in the KSA since the 1960s. It was only then when girls' education was put under the control of a separate administration strictly conducted by conservative clerics as "a compromise to calm public opposition to allowing (not requiring) girls to attend school". (House, 2012:152.) Theoretically and practically, all women have been having access to equal education since then. From a western perspective, it is a widely held view that there is gender inequality (Havril, 2015), moreover, due to the practicing Wahhabi Islam there is gender segregation even in education even in the tertiary sector. Since living in Jizan and teaching at Jazan University (JU), the author is not going to judge gender segregation in this paper, has accepted it as a Saudi specific cultural and social phenomenon, and as a conclusion, prefers to use the term gender separation from now on.

**Female professionalism in the KSA:** In spite of the fact, that even today the struggle for women's education is an ongoing battle in Saudi Arabia, so much effort has been done to bring about equality and acceptance of women's education to close the gender gap, especially in the higher education. Examples are the following: monthly governmental support (around 2000 SAR) to the families; government allowances provided to women for completing their degrees; strategies to increase the minimum marriage age; better training for female teachers; and increasing university and vocational school options, areas, and MA and PhD overseas studies are available to women. What is more, the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, which has been supporting international

university educational chances for thousands of Saudi young men and women around the world since 2005 – will keep running up to 2020 –, has resulted tremendous changes and progress. King Abdullah wanted the young Saudis to know the world and for the world to know them, so they can pursue their higher education goals and meet national labor needs while gaining global experience and understanding of other cultures.

His dream and opening up policy started the Saudi educational youth stride in the field of higher education. The university and scholarship programs have been in line with the demand of the politics of Saudization, which means that companies operating in Saudi Arabia are increasingly expected to hire and train locals instead of relying on expatriate labor force, especially for higher-skilled positions. The growing needs of higher education of the youth demographic in Saudi Arabia is to feed its job market and economic demands to become a greater competitor in the world market. That explains that the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has been focusing on to prepare the Saudi youth for various fields in the public and private sectors.

Concerning the last decade, it seems that the Saudi women stand to benefit more from the latest educational and university projects than the Saudi men. Moreover, we dare to say, that recently the Saudi women tend to be professionally more educated than men, since this is what statistical data support as well. According to the Education Ministry (Abu-Nasr, 2013) some 59,948 women received post-secondary degrees in 2009 compared with 55,842 men. And the latest statistics, released also by the Saudi Education Ministry in 2015, show that women

constitute 51.8 percent of Saudi university students. There are 551,000 women studying bachelor degrees compared to 513,000 men. The ministry also reported that 24,498 Saudi women are completing their graduate studies, a total of 16,221 are completing their master's, and 1,744 are completing their PhD inside the kingdom. The statistics also revealed that there were 35,537 Saudi women studying abroad (US, Europe, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the Arab World, and East Asia, South Africa) in 2014. A total of 3,354 were completing their bachelor's degree, 15,696 were completing their master's degree and 3,206 were completing their PhD in various academic fields including education, social sciences, arts, business, law, engineering, natural sciences, agriculture, medicine, and service sector. (Saudi Gazette, 2015). Definitely, the impact on Saudi society of a new generation of highly educated, internationally and interculturally experienced women – many of whose grandmothers would not even have gone to school or did not write and read at all – is yet to be fully felt. As one Saudi student studying in Washington, D.C. told, "I think women are more ambitious in our country than the men. We have a lot of things to do...We don't have many options, and so we want to open new ones." (Drury, 2015)

**Traditional cultural versa educational values and transformation in Jazan region:** After the establishment of the Jazan Economic City (2011) and the implementation of industrial projects, Jazan region needs to develop, improve and increase the services of technical, intermediate and higher education. University indicators in the region show that tertiary education is one of the sectors which is expected to attract huge investments, and consequently, which is facing an unexpected increase in the numbers of students, and which will finally provide more jobs and employment opportunities in a lot of different disciplines for young Saudi men and women too. (Jazan Region Economy Report, 2014)

The study of the Ministry of Economy and Planning in 2007 (Education in Saudi Arabia, 2007) showed that the highest level of illiteracy was found in the Jazan area at 23.5% in the KSA. The illiteracy among the Jazan males was the highest rate of 14.8%, and the illiteracy of Saudi women was again the highest rate in this region at 31.6% in comparison throughout the whole country. These data, the long term aims of the fast economic development (2011) and the recent past illiteracy rates (2007), also indicate and give an explanation for the controversial policy of Jazan University (established in 2006) which attracts numerous number of male and female students from far away rural areas of the Jazan region to attend the university on a daily basis.

The Jazan University (JU) leadership management, almost all received academic qualifications abroad

(USA, GB or Australia), run internationally accepted, accredited university courses and programs. They are supported by a middleware qualified Saudi admin staff who don't want or can't communicate with the multicultural community of the teachers, most of them coming from the international Muslim community and having different nationalities.

The Jazani youth, (boys and) especially the girls, leaving their culturally very traditional, deeply Islamic families behind, face up a lot of challenges during their university years in the highly developing big city, Jizan. They meet many dos and don'ts, expectations and pressure of educational formalities, the contradictions of the past and the future dreams, and the chances of self-realization in an academic environment. All come from the internationally heavily criticized Saudi public educational system which does not necessarily foster innovation, creativity, competence development and self-confidence (Education in Saudi Arabia World Education News and Reviews, 2011.), all of which are essential to personal, social and economic development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And they all have their cell phones, and a free access to the virtual media world which provide them with good/bad information about the "rest" of the world.

Concerning the long term Jazan Economic City project plans and the deeply traditional Jazan population, a visible economic, social and cultural transition is going on in the region, and a gradual change appears inevitable. Under these backgrounds, since the author is a university professor of Jazan University, and has life experiences there, and collected data from the field of higher education, the present paper aims to examine some areas of female university education as one of the cultural aspects of the above mentioned complex phenomenon of the transition. It also tries to explore some deep Saudi-specific socio-cultural roots which make the Jazani women become more motivated to study than the males. Finally, the paper shows some partial results of a very comprehensive research survey of the intercultural competence (ICC) components of the JU female students.

**Materials and methods:** A quantitative empirical survey research was conducted among the female graduated and undergraduate university students of Jazan University in the College of Arts and Humanities, Girl's Academic Campus 2, at the Department of English, in the first semester of the academic year 2015/2016. The present sample covers Bachelor students as JU has no accredited Master module. The total size of the sample is 212 respondents: 21 graduated, 191 undergraduate students including 135 Sociolinguistics students on level 7 (a course on the last level before graduation) and 56 students of Arts, Education, Linguistics students on level 3 (introductory courses on the first level after the preparatory year

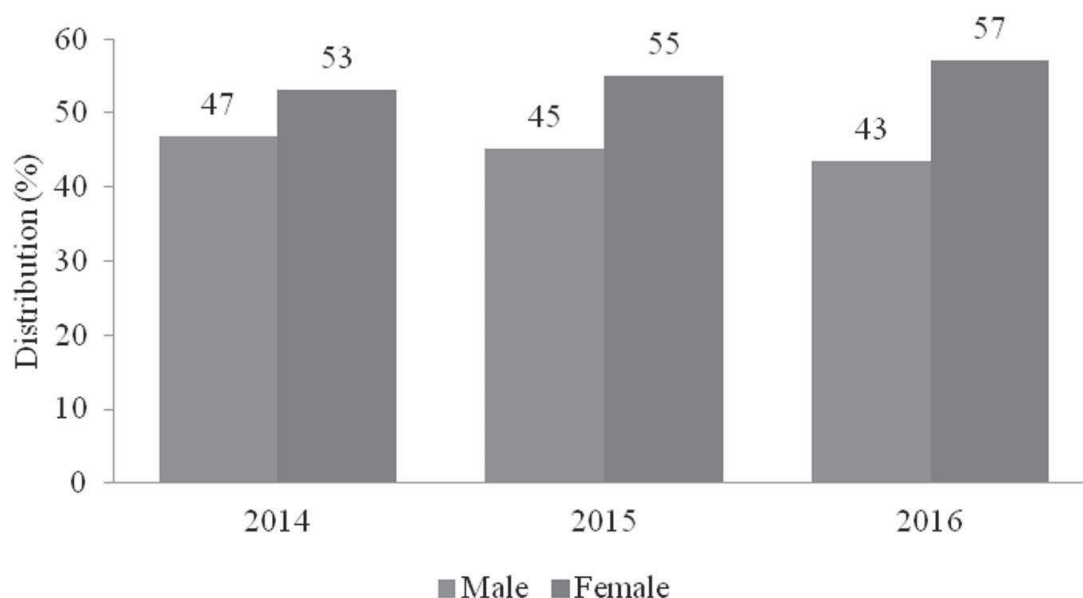
where students study only English language). The participants of the survey were females aged 19 to 25 and were from both rural and urban backgrounds of Jazan.

For the data analysis Microsoft Office Excel (2007) was used. The descriptive statistics summarizes the collection of data. In this study, the mean, standard deviation and coefficient of variation were determined. The nominal standard deviation (called coefficient of variation (CV)) is the standard deviation divided by mean. The 10% and below means homogeneous data, the 10-20% is low heterogeneity, between 20% and 30% termed very heterogeneous and over 30% is very volatile. Under 30% usually there are not significance differences between the data. If the summa of the answers is not 100%, not all people

### Results and discussion:

have answered to the statement. If the summa of the answers is above 100%, one responder has signed more than one answer. There were some limitations of the sample survey. Some smart students of the groups were absent and therefore were not included in the study. Others were reluctant to participate in the study, some do not have appropriate English language use to answer the questions properly that is why they copied their partners' answers. Some participants did not fill the questionnaire completely.

For present purpose, three different groups on three different stages of university studies have been investigated, graduated students with BA degrees (Graduated), active undergraduate students (Sociolinguistics) with university experiences, and unexperienced beginners (Arts-Education-Linguistics).



**Figure 1:** Distribution of males and females at Jazan University (data issued by the Deanship of Admission and Registration, JU, 2016.03. 31.)

Fig. 1 shows the distribution of male and female students registered between 2014 and 2016. It is evident that in the last three years the total number of the male students has been decreasing from 47% to 43%, and the male representation at JU does not reach 50% of the total university population. On the other hand, in the given period the registered number of the female students has been above 50%, and in 2016 it reaches 57%. The ratio between male and female students is almost 40% to 60% which ratio matches with the gender ratio of the western or global tendencies in most universities. These tendencies are probably in line with demography data worldwide, which means that the birthrate of the girls must be higher than the boys. In the long term, these changes forecast the higher number of the educated professional women,

and will definitely influence some socio-cultural changes worldwide, and in the Jazan region too.

Presently, the males can get relatively well-paid jobs easily in Jizan, earning enough money to sustain a family, consequently, they are not motivated to study hard or finish neither their Bachelor nor their Master studies. The situation is just the opposite for the female students. Since education is almost the only public place where these matured women can show up without their "abayas" and "hijabs", they try to stay in the system at whatsoever cost. It even gives them the chance to delay early marriage. What is more, JU system lets a big number of them gain their university certificates (English Department) even if they are not successful, or they even can't speak English at all. Approximately, 60% of the students of the author's classes don't understand the lecturers'

speech. They memorize or copy the exams and easily pass, then move on to a higher level, and repeat the same strategy again. The graduating students have a chance to buy their final research paper (20 pages) from professional thesis writing companies in Jizan or Jeddah for 1000 or 2000 SAR. Most students submit “hardly to find any mistakes” academic papers even though they can’t say a proper sentence in English. Since the accredited JU system and its management close their eyes and foster the students to do so, almost every woman can get a certificate as a teacher of English. This is a strong socio-cultural motivational factor for the females to stay in the system, to become a university student and study and enjoy all of these advantages. Definitely, these controversial conditions pull back and slow down the academic development of the smart female students (approximately 40% of the total) who would really have a good chance in the higher education. As there is no placement test to level out the English language use of the students, the smart and non-smart students are sitting in the same courses, and they face a lot of difficulties in learning because of the big number (60-90 students) of the class sizes.

Moreover, the quality of teaching academic knowledge is negatively affected by the unfairly provided teaching conditions based on gender separation. The teaching conditions of males are on a much higher level than for the females: the number of the students is smaller in the classrooms, they have bet-

ter layouts and seating arrangements in the classroom, they are situated in nicer buildings with bigger space and air, and of course they have no “shasha” teaching. “Shasha” or “screen” teaching is probably available only in Saudi Arabia, and the author dares to say, that this is the most ineffective teaching way, definitely not a method. It is again, the result of gender separation but due to the lack of academic female professionals at JU. Since males can’t see the faces of the women in Saudi Arabia, university male lecturers are standing behind an open air screen which divides the classroom into two parts. The female students are sitting in front of the mirror side of the screen, and listening to the lecturer. To keep control in the classroom and provide the discipline during classes, usually two Saudi admin women are also sitting in the classroom on every lesson.

**Personal data:** Compared to the three groups – graduated students with BA degrees (Graduated), active undergraduate students (Sociolinguistics) with university experiences, and unexperienced beginners (Arts-Education-Linguistics) – the percent of the not married responders was very heterogeneous (CV=25%), the percent of the married responders was a little bit above than heterogeneous (CV=32%). It means, there may not be significance differences between the three groups. In case of zero and one child the data were low heterogeneous (CV=11% and 18%). In other cases, they were very volatile (CV>100%).

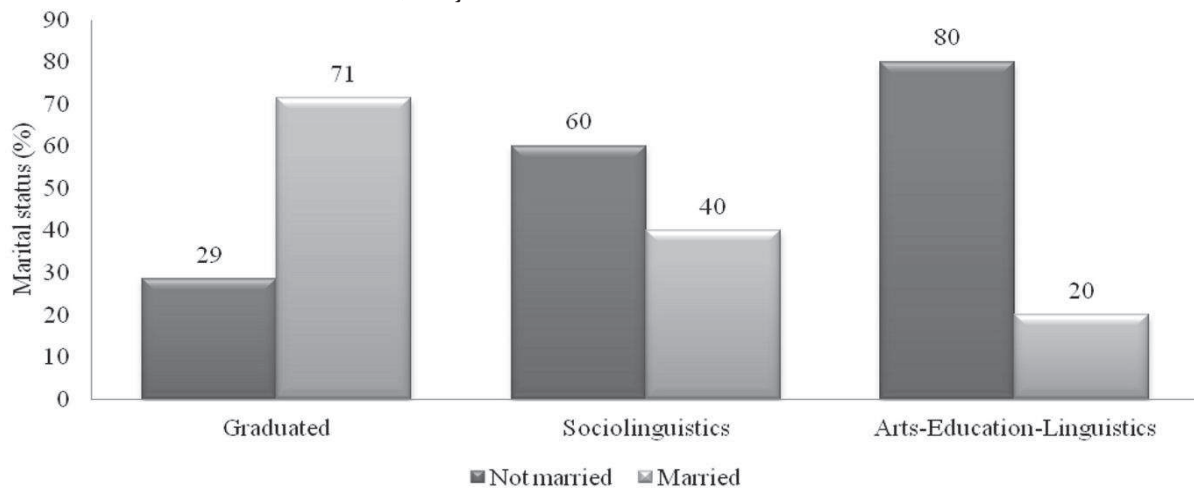
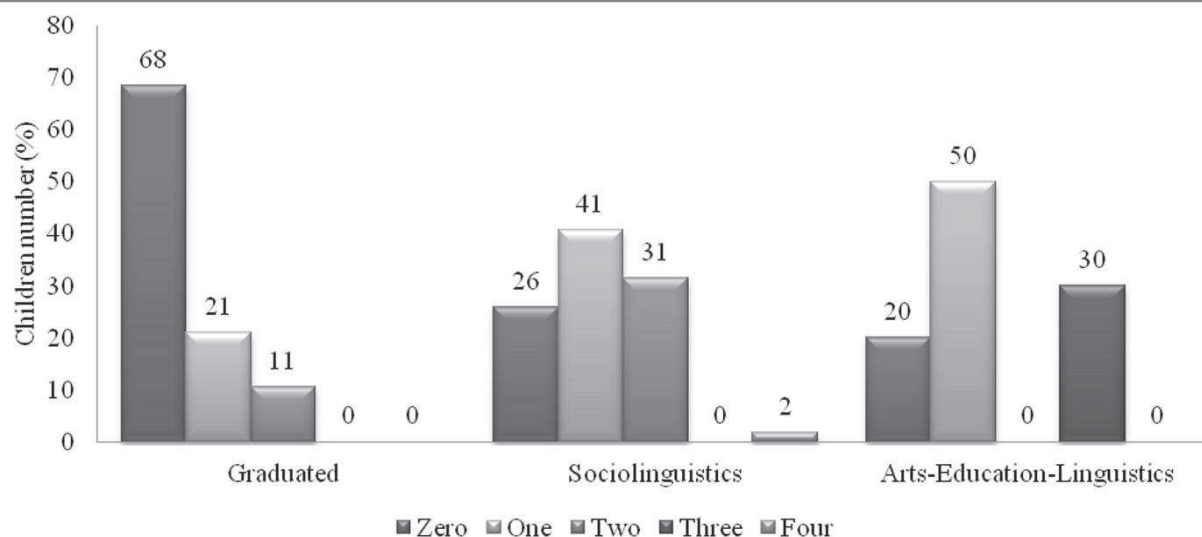


Figure 2: Marital status



**Figure 3:** Number of children

With regard to the marital status (Fig. 2) and the number of the children (Fig. 3) of the respondents, we can see a slight tendency that recently, the young female university students prefer to delay marriage, and favor to have smaller number of children during their university studies. An average married Saudi student has a very hard social role full of a lot of responsibilities. The expectations of the Saudi society speed up their life cycle. They experience and act out the different social roles of a young adult, a matured woman, a wife, a mother and a university student within relatively short period, 5 to 7 years (Havril, 2015). In case of the unmarried university students, the good thing is that the male family members and the society are accepting and tolerating the women's decision, and as a conclusion, they somehow support the females' studies.

Fig. 2 reveals that 60% of the active undergraduate students (Sociolinguistics) are unmarried but among the unexperienced beginners (Arts-Education-Linguistics) 80% of the girls are not yet married. Based on the author's observations and experiences in Jazan culture, probably many, about 10% to 15% of the young girls will marry during their studies if the father of the family receives a good proposal. In the end, due to logics, almost 30 to 50% of the future graduated students will be married by the end of their academic studies.

As pointed out in the introduction to this paper, there is gender separation in the KSA. That is the reason why the Saudi youth have no chance at all for coeducational or mixed socialization, and the women in public places have to cover their faces with "hijab". Women go to separated female parties and weddings (no "hijab") where it is the responsibility of the boy's Mom to find the proper girl for her son. As these parties are closed meetings (family members, neighbors) even today the Moms prefer to select one of the rela-

tives' young girl to marry to her son. Based on the author's talks with the female students and the visits of a lot of parties and weddings, 80% of the marriages come from the same blood line and they are all arranged marriages. Formally, the engagement is based on the financial negotiation between the two fathers, where the fiancé's responsibilities are laid down. After the first talk the youngsters have a chance to see each other face to face for a few minutes, and then they keep contact on their cell phones until the marriage. This event is followed by the court visit where they ask for official permission, and then they have the compulsory medical check-up in the hospital to avoid heritable diseases from the same blood roots. Even if the medical result is positive, the future couple have the right to marry. Then comes the engagement which is a party, especially for the women. In Jazan this is the time for the traditional henna painting and Jazani dancing. This is the first time when the future couple see and talk to each other face to face. After this, the wedding ceremony is coming where the men and the women are again separated and follow the process of the local traditions. It often happens, but the ratio is much smaller nowadays, that these young girls become a second wife of an elderly man, if the proposal is beneficiary for the family. Patriarchal traditions are much stronger in Jazan than anywhere else in the Kingdom, the living standard is also lower here, and the number of the educated youth is still lagging behind the Saudi average, so the young Jazani women have not got much chance to avoid early marriages, and early childbirth. Though they all have the rights to refuse a proposal or later to divorce, socio-cultural bonds tie the girls to the traditions.

Most of these young wives remain pregnant within the first few months of their marriages as taking contraception, or future family planning are neither



common nor socially accepted in the families in this region. The author had three students who delivered children twice within a four semester period. Unfortunately, due to the arranged family marriages, a lot of students have sick children, or children born with fatal illnesses. This is one of the reasons which also slows down their university development and makes them have a lot of absenteeism from the college. Despite the traditional pressure, the smaller number of the children among the students is more seemingly accepted, and secretly supported by their moms who

usually had 8 to 10 children whereas their grandmothers usually had 10 to 15 children, but mainly from two or three husbands. Though Fig. 3 gives the idea, that there have been minor changes and decreasing tendencies in the number of the children of the students, the changes are very slow, and the strong patriarchal ties keep up continuing.

**Perception of the self:** The self-perception of the respondents shows very positive results in Fig. 4 and Fig. 5.

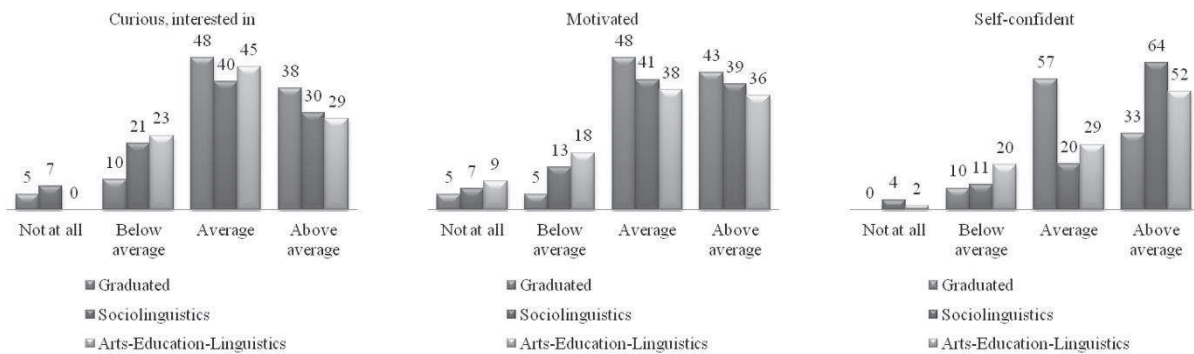


Figure 4: Curiosity, motivation, self-confidence

In case of *curious, interested in*, the answers were low heterogeneous in case of average (CV=9%) and low heterogeneous (CV=16%) in case of above average answers. The others were very volatile. In case of *motivated*, the answers were homogeneous in case of above average (CV=9%) and low heterogeneous (CV=12%) in case of average answers. The others were very volatile. In case of *self-confident*, the answers were very volatile in all cases.

Concerning curiosity, motivation and self-confidence (Fig. 4) almost all of those surveyed, reached the above average level. 64% of the Sociolinguistics students are self-confident on above the average level and 41% of them are motivated, 40% of them are cu-

rious on average level. Since the author was teaching these students, she dares to say that these attitude factors gave a very strong drive in their academic learning, and these groups were the only ones where the sense of competitiveness also appeared among the students during the classes. In case of the youngest ones, 52% of Arts-Education-Linguistics students are self-confident above the average but their motivation (38%) and curiosity (45%) are average which gives the idea that in learning they are not yet fully motivated. The Graduated students don't show outstanding figures, they stay on average level, 57% are self-confident, 48% are motivated and 48% are curious on average level.

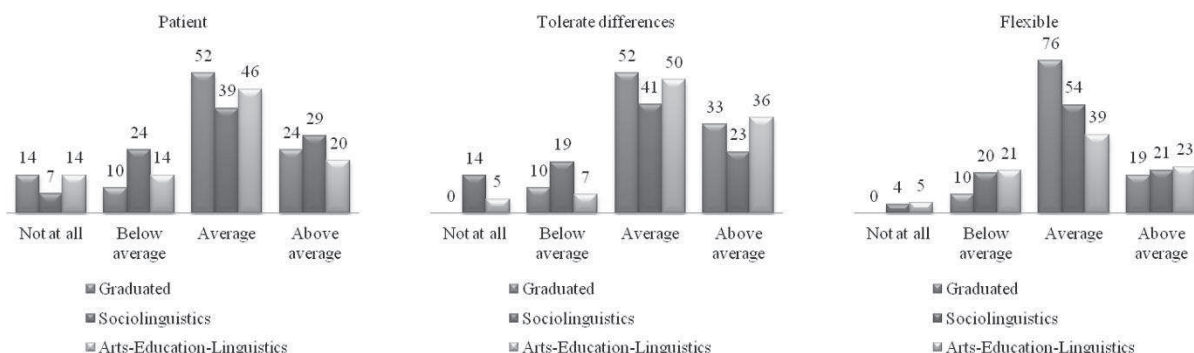


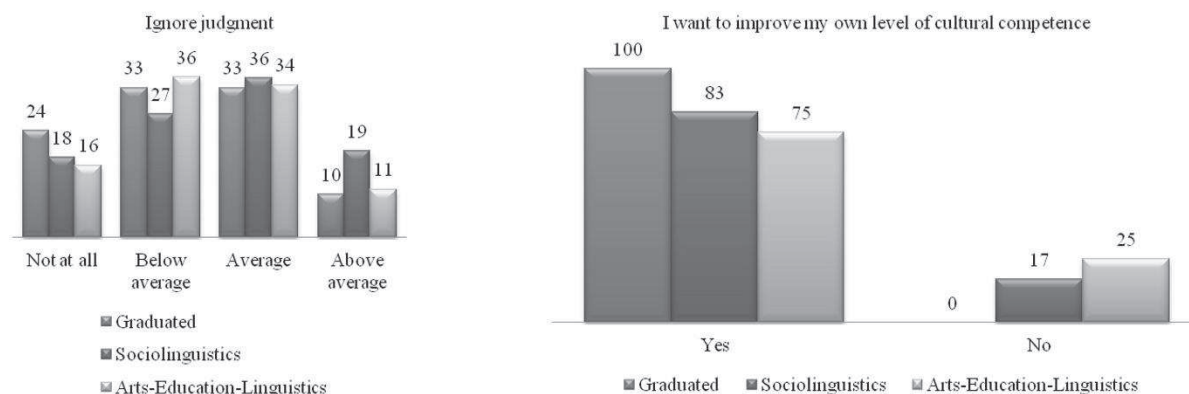
Figure 5: Patience, tolerance, flexibility

In case of *patient*, the answers were low heterogeneous in case of average and above average answers (CV=14% and 19%). The others were very volatile. In case of *tolerate differences*, the answers were low het-

erogeneous in case of average (CV=13%) and very heterogeneous (CV=22%) in case of above average answers. The others were very volatile. In case of *flexi-*

ble, the answers were homogeneous in case of above average (CV=10%). The others were very volatile. Fig. 5 reveals that all graduated students with BA degrees (Graduated), active undergraduate students (Sociolinguistics) with university experiences, and unexperienced beginners (Arts-Education-Linguistics) have positive attitude to being patient, flexible, and to tolerate differences, and the answers

are all on average level. 76% of the Graduated students feel themselves to be flexible, 52% tolerate differences and 52 % are patient. These high ratios are probably the results of their marriage and their own family experiences. The Sociolinguistics and the Arts-Education-Linguistics students show very similar results, between 39% up to 54% toward the above mentioned attitude.



**Figure 6:** Ignorance of judgement, improvement of intercultural competence

In case of *ignore judgement*, the answers were homogeneous in case of average (CV=3%), low heterogeneous (CV=13%) in case of below average and very heterogeneous in case of not at all (CV=21%) answers. The above average answers were very volatile. In relation to the improvement of *intercultural competence*, in case of Yes answers, the three groups showed low heterogeneity (CV=15%). In case of No answers, they were very volatile (CV=91%). It is evident from Fig. 5 and Fig. 6 that there is a strong relation between the ignorance of judgement and intercultural competence, even though all three groups perceived their ignorance of judgement only on below average and average level between 27%-36%. Most theories (Stiftung, 2003 and Deardorff, 2006, 2009) indicate that the higher the level of patience, tolerance, flexibility and ignorance of judgement, the higher the willingness of the individual to interact interculturally in inter- or multicultural interactions. Then they can behave and communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations among members of different cultures, while trying to avoid violating cultural rules. (Havril, 2015) 100% of graduated students are willing to increase their intercultural competence which surmises the influence of education in multicultural academic environment of Jazani females, since they had already attended and completed culture related (Sociolinguistics and Cultural Dialogue) courses. Sociolinguistics students (83%) and Arts-Education-

Linguistics students (75%) show high willingness of the improvement of intercultural competence though they still have a lot to cover until the end of their university studies.

**Knowledge of cultural issues:** The present survey intended to examine the knowledge of cultural issues as one of the basic components of intercultural competence models (Stiftung, 2003 and Deardorff, 2006, 2009), and focused on the essential cultural norms, values and cultural universals such as religion, time-space relation and family.

In case of the first statement, the average answers were very heterogeneous (CV=22%). The others were very volatile. In case of the second statement, all answers were very volatile. In case of the third statement, the below average answers were low heterogeneous (CV=11%). The others were very volatile. In case of the fourth statement, the below average answers were low heterogeneous (CV=15%), the average and above average were very heterogeneous (CV=24% and 25%). In case of the fifth statement, all answers were very volatile. In case of the 6th statement, the average answers were very heterogeneous (CV=30%). The others were very volatile. In case of the seventh statement, the average answers were very heterogeneous (CV=25%). The others were very volatile. In case of the eighth statement, the above average answers were low heterogeneous (CV=13%), the average was very heterogeneous (CV=29%). The others were very volatile.

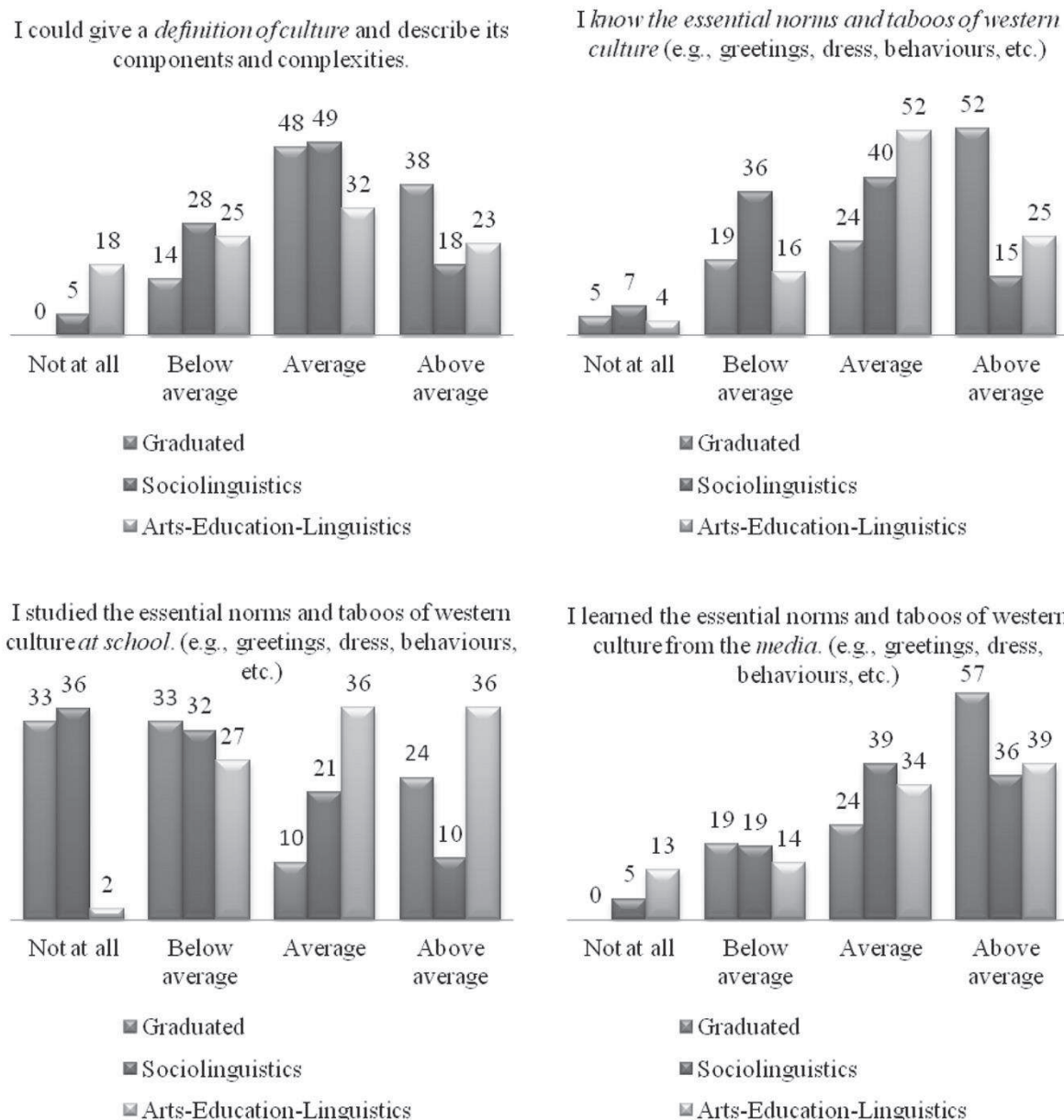


Figure 7: Knowledge of cultural issues (1)

It is evident from Fig. 7 that overall, only approximately 50% of the female students can define culture academically on average level, and the highest ratio is among the Sociolinguistics students (49%) who were currently attending and studying culture related courses at the time of the research survey. The relatively low percentage (49%) is due to the fact that these students did not cover cultural studies at all during their public education. They are definitely lacking the internationally accepted common educational knowledge of certain sociocultural issues transmitted by public educational institutions. The university is the first stage where they become familiar with culture related theories, terminologies and academic approaches. Despite of these shortcomings of the Saudi public education, surprisingly, 40% of Sociolinguistics students and 52% of the Arts-

Education-Linguistics students know the basic norms and taboos of western culture on average level, and 52 % of Graduated students on above average level in opposition to their Saudi culture.

The last two graphs of Fig. 7 support the above discussed possible indications that most students did not learn about the different western cultural norms and values at school. The respondents' answers reveal that on above average level they get familiar with western cultural issues via their media socialization due to the free access of online western mainstream culture (news, films, movies, entertainment media, and popular music) throughout in the KSA. Though there is a slight growth in the number of the Arts-Education-Linguistics students' number (36%), in comparison with the 27% of graduated students studying western cultural norms at school, but the 57% of



graduated students, the 36% of sociolinguistics students and 39% of Arts-Education-Linguistics students indicate and project that multicultural socialization

of the youth will probably be the result of the open internet access in the KSA for a while.

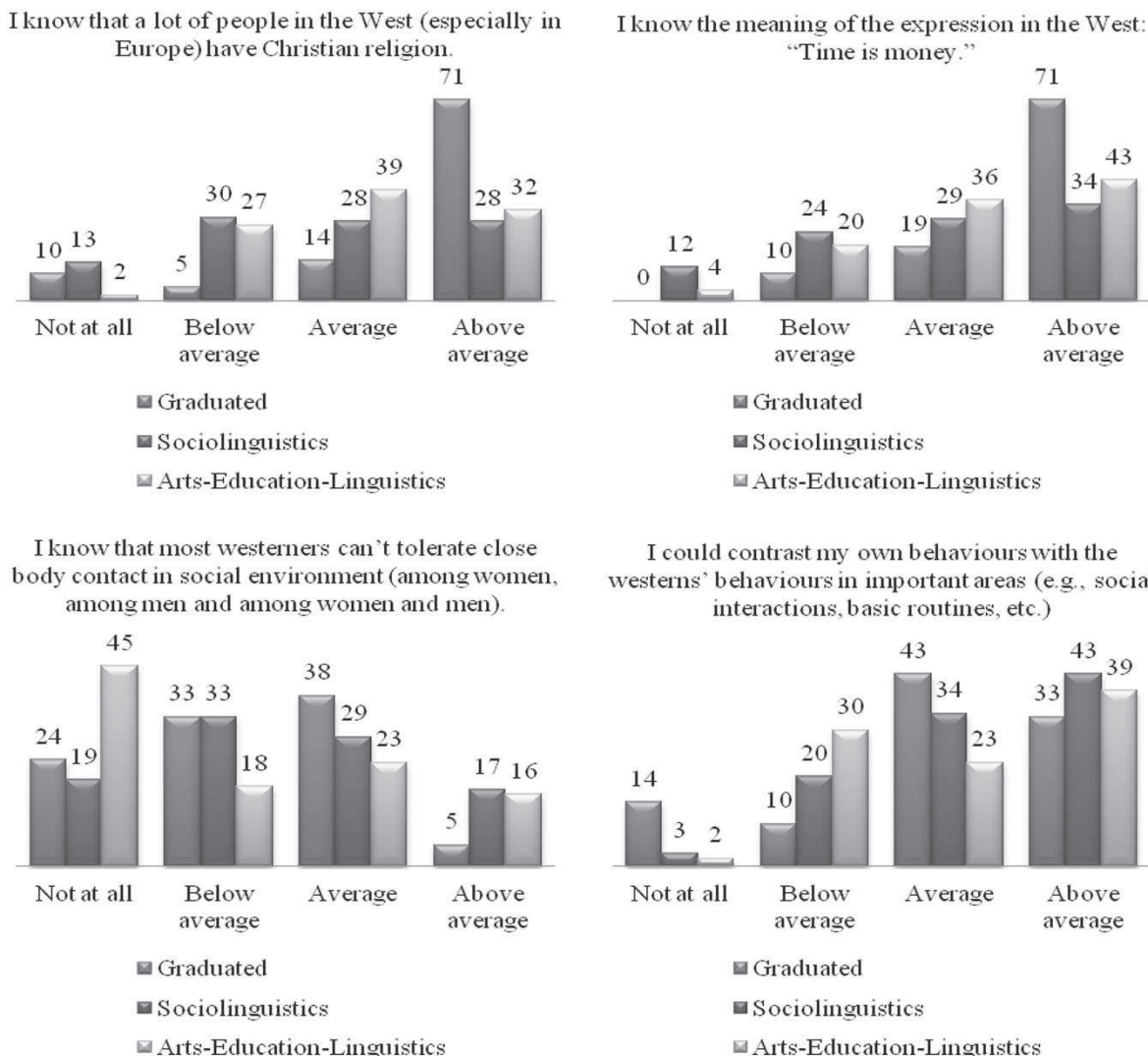


Figure 8: Knowledge of cultural issues (2)

The results in Fig. 8 would seem to suggest that graduating students are not yet familiar with the religious and time-space concepts of cultural differences between the western and Saudi cultures. 71% of graduated students know about Christian religion in the west with comparison to the 28% of sociolinguistics, and 32% of Arts-Education-Linguistics students. Based on the life experiences in Jazan region and at JU, the author definitely states that the time-space perception very much differs in the two cultures. The notion of time is different from the Western perspective, and one possible reason could be that the Saudi students' daily biological clock is adapted to the five time praying ritual. Some of my observations are the following: sometimes teachers really can't expect them to be fit at 2 p.m. if they have been awake since 4 a.m., or, if they want to pray during the lesson, they

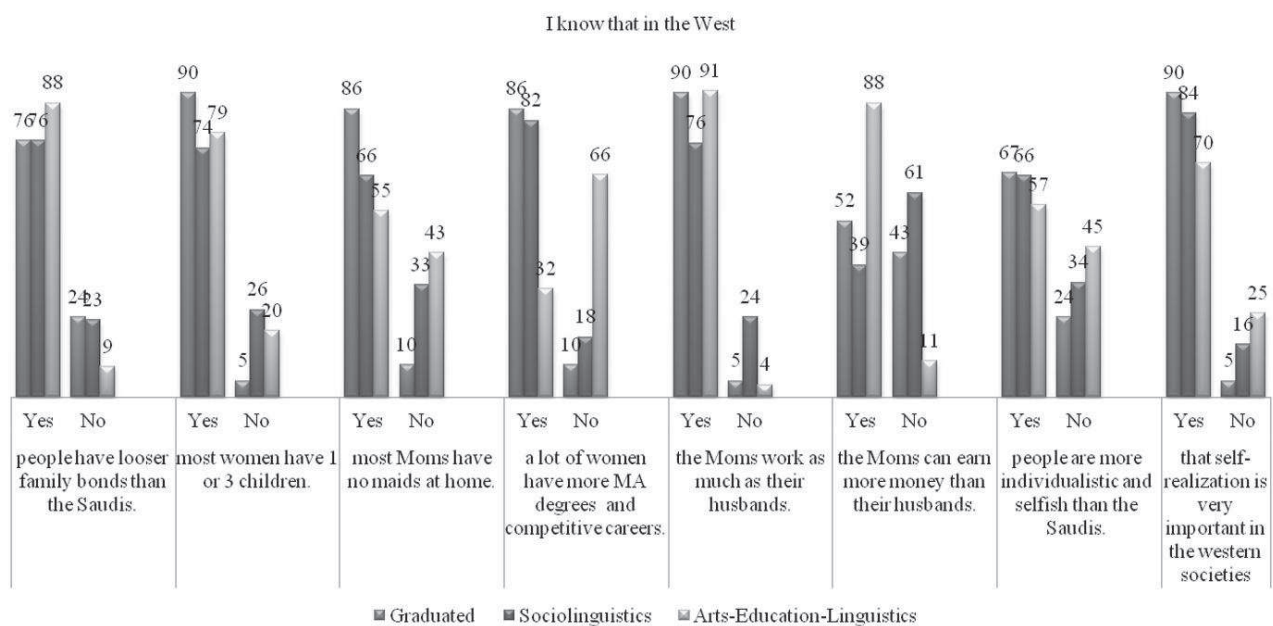
don't disturb the class, let them do so. They never worry about time, they have time for waiting, for being late, for everything. Finally, they do everything, just a bit late. This notion is originated in their daily prayings. If one can't pray right in the time of "sala" (collective official praying time when shops, services all close down for a while), no problem, they can do it later, just do it so. In academic environment it results in the key problem that the students usually miss the deadlines and they don't feel like making a mistake. Space concept is a very different visible phenomenon. Most students ignore the difference between intimate, personal, social and public space (Hall, 1966). They never line up anywhere, they all come around you leaving little space and air to their teacher. This informal behavior or notion of space can be seen among the close body contact of the female students

too. They walk hand in hand on the campus, hug and kiss each other daily to show sisterhood, or just lie on the floor arms in arms during their break time.

These experiences of the author are heavily supported by the findings on the graphs of Fig. 8. Only the graduate students (71%) have an evidently clear knowledge about the western notion of time on above the average level. In relation to space notion, most surprisingly, 45% of Arts-Education-Linguistics students do not have knowledge at all, 33% of sociolinguistics students have knowledge on below average level and 38% of graduated students on average level.

**Knowledge of female issues in the western cultures:** Fig. 9 In case of the 1st statement, the yes answers were homogeneous (CV=8%). The no

answers were very volatile. In case of the 2nd statement, the yes answers were homogeneous (CV=10%). The no answers were very volatile. In case of the 3rd statement, the yes answers were very heterogeneous (CV=22%). The no answers were very volatile. In case of the 4th statement, both answers were very volatile. In case of the 5th statement, the yes answers were homogeneous (CV=10%). The no answers were very volatile. In case of the 6th statement, both answers were very volatile. In case of the 7th statement, the yes answers were homogeneous (CV=8%), the no answers were very heterogeneous (CV=30%). In case of the 8th statement, the yes answers were low heterogeneous (CV=13%). The no answers were very volatile.



**Figure 9:** Knowledge of female issues in the western cultures

The fundamental cultural dimension and value of the family model are based on the Islamic Saudi national identity which is the result of every citizen's socialization process in a gender separated society. This collective programming of the mind, happening in every culture but with different values and norms, is an unconscious process, and usually remains unconscious throughout the life, and we should not question these dimensions. Since Saudi Arabia is a relatively suppressed, not very open society, my female students keep learning about different gender and sociocultural roles and behaviors step by step during their academic studies and their media socialization. This is a new generation gaining extra gender and global knowledge about the different world issues, in comparison to their mothers and grandmothers among whom many still were illiterate but definitely most were uneducated women. Fig. 9 reveals some interesting data and findings which may forecast the appearance of a new, educated female

generation who may interact differently in the society, and may become more gender conscious and more professionally confident in the future.

**Conclusion and future directions:** The present study was designed to reflect some of the evident signals of the social, cultural and gender transition in the Jazan region based on observations and an empirical survey research of the female students of Jazan University. There is no doubt that academic education is the fundamental drive to the above mentioned socio-cultural changes within which context the Saudi women have a big chance to become interculturally and globally competent university students in our communication-driven and culture-convergent world. Research findings reveal that they all have the desire to improve their intercultural competence, to become open, to know the world, and they all desire to let the world know them.

This study introduced the findings of self-perception and knowledge as components of intercultural competence of JU female students. Some data of the research are still in progress but future research

results will describe attitude and skills components of intercultural competence of Jazani females, and will widen the scope of specializations with medical and cultural studies university students.

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