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Developing Critical Thinking in Female Teacher Candidates at SQU; A Predictive Model
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Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, Australian National University, Australia

Abstract: The purpose of this paper was to articulate the way in which socio-cultural factors influence the propensity for critical thinking among female teacher candidates at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in Oman. The sample consisted of 274. Twelve independent variables were ascertained, relating to key Omani institutions and forms of socio-cultural capital. A significant model to predict critical thinking identified religious beliefs and practices, family support for a knowledge society, valuing individual qualities (motivation participation and learning outcomes) over other forms of capital, and the state’s endorsement of the role of teachers as loyal civil servants and trusted agents of change. Implications for teacher education programs and future research are also presented.

Keywords: Critical thinking, teacher education, personal epistemology, Sultanate of Oman.

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This paper is informed by doctoral fieldwork that sought to identify the extent to which socio-cultural factors influenced critical practices among female teacher candidates at SQU. The research was conducted during the 2015/16 Autumn semester and coincided with the achievement of NCATE accreditation by the College of Education (CoE). The purpose of this article is twofold. Using data from an original survey, informed by cultural and critical theories, and drawing specifically on Foucauldian and Bourdieusian notions of power, multiple regression analysis is used to identify the way in which institutions and sources of capital shape attitudes, understandings and behaviour related to higher order thinking. Secondly, the research highlights the way in which culturally appropriate educational paradigms are vital for improvement and quality outcomes in teacher education in Oman.

**Background**

From the time of his ascension to the throne in 1970, Oman’s Sultan Qaboos recognised that education must be a priority in order to “break the chains of ignorance” (Ministry of Information, 2010, p. 17), but, like other Gulf nations, large scale investment in education, fuelled by lucrative oil rents, have enhanced quantitative, rather than qualitative outcomes. In 1984, Arab reformers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) called for new and comprehensive policies for “nurturing intellectual independence and developing creative abilities” to replace the prevailing model characterised by unquestioning acceptance and acquiescence (Nakhleh, 1986, p. 73). The wave of ‘national’ strategies and ‘vision’ formulated by foreign firms and consultants, many in English rather than Arabic, have been criticized for being “more relevant and favourable to foreign concerns than native [citizens]” (Al-Kuwari, 2012, p. 86, Boivin, 2011). In doing so, ingrained meta-narratives which contain the powerful discourses that reinforce a worldview underpinned by Islam and which support the status quo, have been largely overlooked (Romanowski & Nasser, 2012, p. 124). The tension between attempts to implant foreign frameworks and practices and national education systems in the GCC exemplifies the resistance which manifests when external definitions of the task overlook or dismiss internalized values and ideological principles (Barakat, 1993, p. 191).

Importantly, when the personal epistemological beliefs of teachers and students, based on their prior knowledge and experience, are not reconciled, obstacles to learning manifest (Song, Hannafin & Hill, 2007, p.38). Cross-cultural interactions that lack mutually nuanced understandings of the Other’s discourse (Ismail, 2014), will likely produce this phenomenon, which Festinger termed ‘cognitive dissonance’. It is the resistance or disharmony which occurs when current understandings are incongruous with a new cognition. In the main, Festinger noted that behavior was accordingly rationalized by overvaluing choices and under-valuing unpalatable alternatives. Thus the established, comfortable understandings, methods or feelings are retained, whilst rejecting reformist strategies. Chabrak and Craig (2013, p. 24) report different pathways to restore coherence. Understanding can be modified to accommodate new facts when such facts are integrated to preserve a sense of self by virtue of an avoidance mechanism. Alternatively appropriate information may be consciously selected and behavior may adjust to reflect the new knowledge. Fischer (1996) found that dissonance is generally less whenever the external power is significant; a pertinent observation in a collectivist society such as Oman.

The Arab Human Development Report (AHDR), *Building a Knowledge Society*, 2003, pp. 12-13, focused world-wide attention on a dearth of ‘critical thinking’ and the need to overturn curriculum and assessment instruments that emphasize the regurgitation of facts rather than their application. Five years later, a review of education in the Arab world by the Brookings Institute ascertained that:

“education spending is high in global terms in the region, and certainly that’s something to applaud, but... [there is] a lack of teaching critical thinking, and also inadequately-trained teachers, which turns out to be a far more important producer of success than pure spending ...on education” (Brookings Institution, 2008, p. 13)

Teacher training was identified as the major factor if Arab states were to effectively build knowledge societies. The Arab Knowledge Report *Preparing Future Generations for a Knowledge Society* (2010/11) was tasked with monitoring the quality of education based on the acquisition of knowledge and the values
imbued by the system, and it too found that “education systems in Arab regimes are traditional and of poor quality”. Its authors cited inhibitory socio-cultural factors, rigid knowledge definitions and sources, along with an authoritarian pedagogy and a dominant bureaucracy collectively as the network of relations that combine to thwart efforts for social and educational reform which would equip “new generations with the skills and values of the knowledge society aspired by Arab countries” (Arab Knowledge Report, 2010/11, pp. 33-34). Concerns about the quality of teacher education were reiterated in 2014, given the endurance of largely traditional methods, with “less emphasis on practical training and pedagogy than on theory and content” (Ridge, 2014, p. 34). General observations about the ‘Arab world’ overlooked the determination by reformist Omani administrators and teacher educators, to engender a shift towards student-centred pedagogy, informed by reflective, higher order thinking and an extended practicum.

Indigenous commitment in the CoE to the inculcation of critical thinking skills can be found in the College’s Conceptual Framework, formulated to underpin the process for NCATE accreditation, and conceived through extensive consultation. Although accreditation is expected to bring greater transparency and quality assurance, Neisler et al. (2016, p. 78) problematize the fact that Standard 1: Candidate Knowledge Skills and Professional Dispositions, makes no mention of critical abilities for the acceptable level in any subskills. It is only at the highest or target level of professional attainment that NCATE seeks candidates who demonstrate their knowledge through inquiry, critical analysis, and synthesis of the subject. Between 2010 and 2013, Neisler et al. (2016, p. 91), used the California Critical Thinking Skills Test to measure critical thinking among teacher candidates in the CoE at SQU, concluding that “teacher candidates neither have the reasoning skills when they enter university nor at the end of their third year”. It would appear that whilst policies and public statements advocate for student-centred practices, critical thinking and commitment of educators to building a knowledge society characterised by creative, the rhetoric is different from the reality. The question is ‘Why?’

Irrespective of the cultural context, education and learning are based on implicit assumptions about what knowledge is, and the way it should be transmitted (Gardner, 1984, pp. 270-273), but it is the internalized cultural logic that makes sense of ‘knowledge’ and its dissemination. Personal epistemologies reflect the ways in which individuals “view reality, draw conclusions about truth, knowledge and authority” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 3). Embodied in this understanding is the way that knowledge is defined, constructed and evaluated; “where it resides and how knowing occurs” (Hofer, 2002, p. 4). Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, conceptualizes the relationship between outer/objective and inner/subjective and the process whereby social facts become internalized (Maton, 2008, p. 53). The development of such perceptions by students, whether they be in schools or institutions of higher education, is mediated by culturally specific environments and interactions (Cheng, Chan, Tang & Cheng, 2009; Chan & Elliott, 2004). Closer examination of the antecedents and consequences of personal epistemological beliefs, highlights the inter-relationship between culture, the source and authority of knowledge, ways of knowing and the capacity to think and learn (Schommer-Aikens, 2004).

The way in which teacher educators and teacher candidates make meaning of the world around them, in turn justifies the legitimacy of knowledge, influencing the types of learning environments and relationships they will produce (Giroux, 1996). Schools and universities however, are contested spaces where the dominant political, economic and social issues manifest in the authority of organisations and institutions (Youdell, 2011, p. 7). Al-Maamari (2016, 454) asserts that in order to overcome prejudicial stereotypes, Omani teachers need to adopt student-centred, intercultural learning experiences related to Omani culture. It is therefore important to understand the interplay between ways of knowing, social capital and the development of a self-concept which facilitates self-regulated learning and higher order thinking. This paper seeks to elucidate the nexus between the network of power relations in Omani culture and the propensity for critical thinking among female teacher candidates in the College of Education at SQU.
Method

Survey

An original survey incorporating open and closed questions and statements requiring a response based on a five point Likert scale, was purposefully constructed to answer the following key research questions:

1. In what way do socio-cultural factors (either singularly or in combination) shape the personal epistemologies, thinking and pedagogy of female Omani teacher candidates?

2. Can critical thinking co-exist in the teaching and learning repertoire of pre-service teachers alongside time-honoured Arab-Islamic traditions, Omani customs and values?

The survey encompassed five broad areas of interest: the identity/background of female teacher candidates, learning styles, personal epistemological positions, teaching practice and the source and importance of social and cultural forms of capital. The battery of statements relating to personal learning style was not an attempt to label students according to popular paradigms associated with psychological types or preferences. In fact, Hattie (2012) condemns the attribution of learning styles, arguing that this practice overlooks the fact that students can change, can learn new ways of thinking and can meet challenges in learning. Instead, this battery was an attempt to examine the affective, cognitive and behavioural domains associated with each respondent’s personal learning experience. Similarly, the statements pertaining to teaching philosophy were not designed to align respondents’ responses with the great educational thinkers; rather they were an attempt to analyse perceptions about the role, responsibilities and identity of female teachers in Oman.

These groupings were based on the researcher’s lengthy experience in the field and were informed by the literature pertaining to social and educational psychology, the sociology of education, Critical and Cultural theory. Of particular relevance is the constructivist understanding that “social forces shape our understanding of what constitutes knowledge and ... our subjectivities or... our identities” (Kincheneloe & Steinberg, 1993, p. 303) and the Foucauldian concept of genealogy which facilitates tracing these formations. Statements connoting distinction, legitimacy and dominance draw upon Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice and seek to discern the codes or social signs that “channel the deep structural meanings shared by all members” (Schwartz, 1997, p. 83) of Omani culture. In addition, Hattie’s meta-analysis of visible learning and effective teaching (2012, 2009) provided the basis for questions and statements pertaining to classroom pedagogy, learning styles, teaching philosophy, behaviour management and motivation.

Sample

A purposive method of sampling was used. All of the female candidates enrolled in the College of Education were potential respondents. From a total of 1874 students, enrolled for the 2015/2016 academic year, 1188 were females. Of the total female student population, 274 completed the survey, equating to twenty-three percent of the total female student population in the CoE. Table 1 summarises the distribution of respondents across the Bachelor of Education and Post-Graduate Diploma and Masters courses (Table 1).

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<th>Course</th>
<th>Female Enrolment</th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Education (3 years F/T)</td>
<td>1028</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma of Education (1 year F/T)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters of Education (2 years F/T)</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>26</td>
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*Source: Admission and Registration Deanship (2015). College of Education, SQU.*

Seventy-five percent of the total responses came from the Under-Graduate population and the majority of those were in their first or second year, identified by their enrolment in Foundations and Methods courses. (Table 2).

<table>
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<th>Second Year Methods</th>
<th>Third Year Practicum</th>
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<td>Total Female Enrol.</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total Undergraduate Responses</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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</table>

*Source: Admission and Registration Deanship, (2015). College of Education, SQU.*
Diploma of Education students are those who have completed their undergraduate degree and have elected to study for an additional year to qualify as teachers. Masters’ candidates have endured a rigorous selection process, which reflects not only their teaching prowess, motivation and leadership potential, but is based on their previous academic record, an interview and an entrance examination. Only those students with the highest results in the Graduate Diploma at the end of Year 12 are admitted to SQU.

Although, English is taught in schools from Year One and all students enrolling at SQU must demonstrate competency at Level Six on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) in their Foundation Year to progress into their preferred discipline, Arabic is the official language of Oman. To reduce survey error due to issues with idiom, the questionnaire was translated into Modern Standard Arabic. The survey was tested and reviewed by Omani teacher educators prior to its administration.

Identification of Key Variables

A meta-analysis of all survey data reorganised statements based on relevance to the key institutional sources of power within Omani society: the Family, Islam and the State, with the latter separated into the significance of the country’s leadership and policymaking bodies and that of the educational program at the College of Education at SQU. Social and Symbolic sources of capital on the basis of tribal heritage and ethnic origins, family and kinship status and individual qualities grouped as key epistemological determinants. In each case the batteries of statements were tested for reliability using Cronbach’s Alpha (α > 0.7) and the factor analyses met tests for significance based on a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO > 0.6) and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity (BTS) (p < 0.001).

Critical Thinking as the Dependent Variable

In a factor analysis of Personal Learning Styles, an affinity for debate, interdisciplinary connections and diverse perspectives grouped as the primary factor. These learning experiences require the ability to evaluate, analyse, justify, synthesise, explain, clarify, compare and contrast. As such, this Factor became the dependent variable: Critical Thinking.

Family

Five statements related to the relevance and influence of family and these produced a Cronbach’s Alpha score of 0.739. A factor analysis was valid (KMO = 0.611, BTS<0.001) and grouped about two iterations: Beliefs and Opinions. (See Table 4A in Appendix.) Mothers in particular, followed by fathers and husbands strongly influenced the teaching philosophy of their daughters. In the public domain, fathers were more influential in engendering support for a Knowledge Society based on increased freedom of thinking and creativity. Beliefs accounted for 47.03% of the variance and the two factors together explain 81.47% of overall variance.

Islam

Eleven variables across the survey were initially identified as relevant to religion and included the likelihood of young women following female Muslim activists, the importance of teachers in Oman being Muslim and Islamic scholars supporting the notion of a knowledge society. Cronbach’s Alpha was highest (α= 0.729) using only the eight statements concerning religiosity. Private, family based religious practices and beliefs (s² = 29.40) were paramount and distinct from public demonstrations of religiosity (s² = 21.40) such as involvement in religious groups. Candidates preferred informal overformal religious groups. The two factors: Personal and Public religious practices were retained as the independent variables pertaining to Islam. (See Table 4B in Appendix).

The State

‘The State’ encompasses the significance of His Majesty and government agencies, particularly the Ministry of Education in the construction of a knowledge society. In addition, patriotic and nationalistic sentiments have also been included as a gauge of the candidates support for the leadership and its strategic plan for education in Oman. Identification of statements relating to motivation, teaching philosophy, the importance of critical pedagogy and a Knowledge Society in Oman in terms of their affiliation with ‘The State’ comprise this battery. A Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.765 confirms the reliability of the selection.
Tests for sampling adequacy (KMO = 0.764, BTS: p<0.001) supported a factor analysis which successfully reduced the dimension to two independent variables. (See Table 4C in Appendix). Factor One pertained to the national role and responsibilities of teachers, accounting for 35.92% of the overall variance. This was closely followed by 31.34% of the variance being explained by the second factor, which grouped around clear links between the vision of the Sultan, the government’s implementation thereof and the national importance of building a Knowledge Society.

The College of Education at SQU

The influence of the Bachelor, Diploma and Masters programs on student attitudes to critical thinking and critical pedagogy is an important part of trying to understand the factors at play for female candidates at the College of Education. As the most prestigious and politically influential seat of teacher education in Oman, statements pertaining to the university experience were identified and tested for reliability. The final battery included statements drawn from Questions addressing Personal Learning Style, Teaching Philosophy, Attitudes to Critical Pedagogy, Expectations for Independent Thinking by school students and Support for a Knowledge Society. A Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.755 confirms the reliability of this selection.

Factor Analysis was warranted (KMO = 0.781, BTS<0.001) and reduced the dimension to three iterations accounting for 66.35% of the overall variance. Factor One reflected the national priorities ($s^2$ = 31.26), Factor Two, the contribution of faculty ($s^2$ = 17.92) and Factor Three pertained to the importance of education for girls ($s^2$ = 14.17). The national priorities reinforced by the CoE relate to critical pedagogy and the fact that it is Islamic, relevant and necessary for authentic Arab and Omani society, appropriate for Omani women and girls and is important for lifelong learning. The contribution of faculty centres on the role of lecturers to provide a diverse, targeted reading list and to uphold and promote the role of teachers in Oman. (See Table 5A in Appendix). Girls’ Education is also a priority, given the way teachers motivate girls to love learning and focus on individual motivation rather than social or symbolic capital.

Social Capital

In the context of this research, it is social capital or the capital that influences social interaction and status, which is of interest. Question 31: Influences on teacher expectations of students to think independently, was designed to pinpoint the influence of social capital in the classroom and in the way that teacher candidates judge their students. Statements connoting distinction, legitimacy and dominance attempted to discern the codes or social signs that channel the deep structural meanings shared by all members of Omani culture. The first two iterations in the factor analysis for Question 31 (KMO = 0.784, BTS: p < 0.001) related to social capital: Family Status ($R^2 = 0.229$) followed by ethnicity and tribal heritage ($R^2 = 0.215$), whilst the third factor pertained to individual qualities such as learning outcomes, motivation and participation ($R^2 = 0.197$). (See Table 5B in Appendix).

Symbolic Capital

‘Assets’ which advantage or disadvantage one’s social or cultural status are what Bourdieu defines as symbolic capitals (Moore, 2008). The battery of statements in Question 27 sought to discern the symbolic capital associated with the teaching profession and included statements about teacher identity, role and public representation. Arab, Omani and Muslim identity coalesced as three important descriptors for Omani teachers and as such represented the symbolic capital attached to teacher identity. (See Table 5C in Appendix.)

Results

The Enter Method of Regression Analysis drew upon the 12 independent variables as potential predictors. Tolerance, as a measure of one independent variable against the remaining independent variables, was low for SQU: Girls’ Education ($F = 0.514$) and was removed along with four multivariate outliers. A predictive model (p<0.05) comprised Public and Private Religiosity, Social Capital: Individual Qualities, State: Teacher Roles and Responsibilities, and Family: Support for a Knowledge Society. There is no evidence of constant variance among the linear relationships between the variables (heteroscedasticity). Additionally, there is no multi-collinearity as denoted by high Tolerance (0.906 to 0.983) and low variance inflation factors (VIF), summarized in Table 3.
Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

A. Dependent Variable: Critical Thinking

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<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.342</td>
<td>.733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity - PRIVATE</td>
<td>.264</td>
<td>.244</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religiosity - PUBLIC</td>
<td>.210</td>
<td>.223</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family support for KS</td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation Individual Qualities</td>
<td>.228</td>
<td>.226</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The State - Teacher role and responsibility</td>
<td>.214</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a significant model ($F(5,189) = 15.060$, $p<0.001$) that accounts for 28.5% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.285$). Standardized Beta Coefficients indicate the contribution of each of the independent (predictor) variables to the criterion (critical thinking) after removing the effects of the other predictor variables. Foremost was Private Religiosity ($\beta = 0.244$, $p < 0.001$), followed by Social Capital: Individual Qualities ($\beta = 0.226$, $p < 0.001$), Public Religiosity ($\beta = 0.223$, $p < 0.001$), the State: Teacher Roles and Responsibilities ($\beta = 0.197$, $p < 0.01$) and lastly Family: Support for a Knowledge Society ($\beta = 0.174$, $p < 0.01$). Excluded from the model were Social and Symbolic Capitals relating to tribal/ethnic identity, family status and teacher identity, as well as institutional variables relating to SQU, The State: National Vision and Family Beliefs as they influence teaching philosophy.

Discussion

Ismail (2014) reasons that disengagement with educational reforms promoting critical thinking, is the result of a disconnection or contradiction between core values and behaviours. Similarly, Mesfer (2014) identified seven major obstacles to critical thinking in Islamic Education classrooms in Saudi Arabia. These entailed student ability, teaching methods, classroom structure, Saudi society and the school community, pre-service teacher education, professional development for existing teachers and the curriculum. In contrast, this research has identified a preference in personal learning styles for critical thinking skills and has produced a statistically significant model to predict these skills.

In order of effect, the model comprises Private Religiosity, Expectations based on Individual Qualities, Public Religiosity, The State (definition of the teacher’s role and responsibilities) and Family Support for a Knowledge society. Thus, the predictive model for critical thinking highlights the Foucauldian network of relations that exists between the key institutions of the State, Islam and Family and the dynamic influence of capital. The combined affirmation by these institutions and the capacity to look beyond ingrained, prejudicial social and symbolic capital, accounts for 28.5 percent of the variance that explains critical thinking.

In the five-part predictive model, the foremost factor was Private Religiosity, wherein personal religious beliefs uphold the Qur’ān as a guide for teaching, behaviour management and problem-solving and there is concurrence between the teacher candidate and her family about Islam. There is clearly a significant link between the Qur’ān and personal epistemology but it remains unclear whether or not candidates subscribe to Sahin’s (2013, P. 209) assertion that the educational aim of the Qur’ān is:

“to nurture an ethically responsible, critical and open attitude within humanity, so that people of diverse cultures, faiths and races engage with a meaningful dialogical process of learning from one another.”

The second factor however, also aligns with the aforementioned Qur’ānic aim for education. Individual qualities of students: their motivation to achieve, participation and their results, combine to surmount ascribed stereotypes that stratify students on the basis of social and symbolic capitals. Socio-cultural capital, devoid of the traditional markers of ethnicity, tribe, kinship links, wealth, domicile and influence is not the norm for respondents, but the importance of this factor presents a clear goal for teacher educators. The College’s Conceptual Framework (n.d.) explicitly states that learners are central in the teaching-learning process and that every child is capable of learning. This view is supported by the Ministry of Education’s ongoing development of the curricula and textbooks which promote student-centred learning experiences that require higher order thinking skills.

Although Public Religiosity: participation in Informal and Formal religious groups, is a vague factor, understanding is informed by Limbert’s (2010) description and analysis of an
Ibādhī study circle for young women in Bahla in 1996-97, facilitated by a teacher candidate. Limbert notes that these young women were not only helping to reformulate what education and knowledge were, they were also reformulating religion and what is meant to be a good person: moving away from the idea that the responsibilities and obligations of sociality were good, to the idea that if the focus of everyday life was not on God, then the activity was not appropriately religious and did not qualify under the category or definitions of proper religiosity.

Thus the significance of either formal or informal religious groups comes to light. If the discourse of education is couched in Islamic epistemology, it can be absorbed by families and therefore enter the habitus, to be reinforced and reproduced in schools. Attending a religious group was not the general practice of respondents, but this result reinforces the alignment with Islamic interpretation and the prospects for critical thinking.

The fifth and final predictive factor for Critical Thinking is Family Support for a Knowledge Society, wherein both parents support free and creative thinking by their daughters to achieve the vision for a Knowledge Society. Such a society is one in which equal opportunities exist for all citizens and life-long learning is a feature. The inclusion of the Family in the predictive model completes the trifecta of support by the key institutions in Oman for critical thinking. The negative relationship between Family Support and Social Capital: Tribe and Ethnicity also suggests that when families endorse critical thinking, they also reject prejudice based on tribal heritage or ethnicity. Families that are resistant to a Knowledge Society, regard it as an imposed Western concept. They retain traditional sociocultural capitals which negatively correlate with the idea of a student thinking independently because of her personal motivation. The Family’s position in terms of a Knowledge Society is also strongly linked to private religious beliefs and behaviours, thereby aligning religious knowledge and interpretation, via the habitus, to critical thinking.

**Conclusion**

This study supports the assertion that successful educational reform in the Arab world requires reconciliation with “an Islamic ontological, epistemological and axiological framework” (Ismail, 2014, P. 41). Attitudes, cognition and behaviour pertaining to critical thinking are unlikely to manifest without the combined institutional endorsement by the Family, Islam and the State. The predictive model highlights the ability of particular candidates to set aside prejudicial stereotypes, valuing instead, the intrinsic motivation of students, their willingness to participate in discussion and the evaluation of learning outcomes.

Given that this research coincided with the achievement of NCATE accreditation, the results provide a benchmark for the effects of accreditation in the College of Education and prospects for critical thinking. A longitudinal study would map the influence of predictive variables and track the evolution of quality teacher education at SQU. Application of this study to male teacher candidates at SQU would facilitate greater understanding of the dynamics of power relations, personal epistemologies and pedagogies as they relate to the male experience of education in Oman. In addition, this research methodology may also provide the basis for future comparative analyses with other Muslim countries, but particularly between the member states of the GCC.

Educational reform for the development of a Knowledge Society requires indigenous solutions wherein key institutions combine to endorse the reforms and in the context of the Arab world, the reforms must align with the individual, familial and institutional positions of Islam within the national context. Sustainable development is ensured when the ingrained, internalized cultural logic justifies the path to progress, such that teacher education programs construct a professional identity marked by critical practice.

**References**


Ministry of Information. (2010). The Royal Speeches of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin


## Appendix

### Table 4

**A. Factor Analysis for the Institutional Influence of the Family**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28.3 My Teaching Philosophy is influenced by father's beliefs</td>
<td>.909</td>
<td>.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.4 My Teaching Philosophy is influenced by mother's beliefs</td>
<td>.931</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.5 My Teaching Philosophy is influenced by husband's beliefs</td>
<td>.806</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.4 Knowledge Society - father supports increased freedom of thinking &amp; creativity</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.5 Knowledge Society - mother supports increased freedom of thinking &amp; creativity</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.920</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### B. Question 12: Religiosity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.1 I quote the Qur'an every day</td>
<td>.602</td>
<td>.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2 When I am worried, I turn to the Qur'an</td>
<td>.710</td>
<td>.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3 The Qur'an guides my teaching</td>
<td>.750</td>
<td>.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.4 I pray 5 times each day</td>
<td>.509</td>
<td>.270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5 I correct misbehaviour using my knowledge of the Qur'an</td>
<td>.545</td>
<td>.264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.6 I attend an informal religious group</td>
<td>.603</td>
<td>.908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.7 I attend a formal religious group</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td>.845</td>
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</table>

### C. Factor analysis for Institutional Influence of the State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27.8 Teachers are trusted agents of change</td>
<td>.835</td>
<td>.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.9 Teachers are loyal civil servants</td>
<td>.778</td>
<td>.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.10 Teachers shape the future in Oman</td>
<td>.824</td>
<td>.261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.1 A Knowledge Society is part of HM's vision</td>
<td>.184</td>
<td>.830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.2 A Knowledge Society is reflected in Government policy</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.10 A Knowledge Society is important to safeguard Oman's future</td>
<td>.366</td>
<td>.586</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Table 5

**A. Factor Analysis of the Institutional Influence of the CoE, SQU**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26.1 Expect Lecturer to give approved reading list for answers</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.855</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.2 Use texts by Muslim &amp; non-Muslim authors to support my arguments</td>
<td>.262</td>
<td>.674</td>
<td>-.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.5 Teachers motivate girls to love learning</td>
<td>-.050</td>
<td>.203</td>
<td>.766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.1 Critical Pedagogy is a Western Idea that is appropriate to Omani girls/women</td>
<td>.831</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>-.150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.4 Critical Pedagogy is Islamic</td>
<td>.823</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.5 Critical Pedagogy is important for lifelong learning</td>
<td>.522</td>
<td>.304</td>
<td>.388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.6 Critical Pedagogy is necessary for an authentic Omani society</td>
<td>.795</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.137</td>
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<tr>
<td>30.8 Critical Pedagogy is relevant in an authentic Arab society</td>
<td>.873</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>-.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.11 Expect to think based on personal motivation to Succeed</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.3 Knowledge Society - University Lecturers remind students of teacher's role</td>
<td>-.056</td>
<td>.674</td>
<td>.234</td>
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</table>

### B. Factor Analysis of Variables Pertaining to Social Capital

**Question 31: Influences on Teacher Candidates Expectations for Students to Think Independently**

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31.1 Expect to think based on past results</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.2 Expect to think based on willingness to participate in discussion</td>
<td>-.044</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.3 Expect to think based on Family's approval of this behaviour</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.428</td>
<td>.590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.4 Expect to think based on ethnic origins</td>
<td>.290</td>
<td>.861</td>
<td>.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.5 Expect to think based on tribal heritage</td>
<td>.339</td>
<td>.829</td>
<td>.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.7 Expect to think based on family connections</td>
<td>.628</td>
<td>.334</td>
<td>.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.8 Expect to think based on rural or urban origins</td>
<td>.855</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.9 Expect to think based on where she lives</td>
<td>.873</td>
<td>.179</td>
<td>.153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.10 Expect to think based on family wealth</td>
<td>.613</td>
<td>.446</td>
<td>.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.11 Expect to think based on personal motivation to Succeed</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>-.414</td>
<td>.579</td>
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</table>

### C. Grouping of Identity Statements in Teaching Philosophy

**Question 27: Teaching Philosophy - Identity Statements**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Component</th>
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<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27.1 It is important for female teachers in Oman to be Omani</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.803</td>
<td>-.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.2 It is important for female teachers in Oman to be Arab</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.863</td>
<td>-.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.3 It is important for female teachers in Oman to be Muslim</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>.789</td>
<td>.158</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How Jordanian Students Learn about Americans?  
A Case Study at Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan

Irene Gibson & Mohammed S. Banihani*  
Macalester College, USA  
Yarmouk University, Jordan

Abstract: This study investigated how educational programs affect Jordanian students’ perceptions of Americans. Students were from Yarmouk University in Jordan. The focus was twofold: first, to document opinions about Americans and American-related topics. Second, to determine if various educational programs relating to Americans impact opinions about Americans. The focus of the study compared students involved in cultural exchange programs to students not involved in exchange programs. This study was based on a questionnaire distributed to a purposeful sample of undergraduate and graduate students at Yarmouk University. Participation in a cultural exchange program was found to not have a significant effect on opinion of Americans. Program participants reported a greater proportion of “very positive” opinions of Americans, and did not hold “very negative” opinions of Americans, but these differences were not statistically significant. When comparing average opinions on Americans and related questions, exchange participants reported on average more positive opinions in cultural categories, but more negative opinions in governmental categories. The average confidence in knowledge about Americans was higher in exchange participants than the confidence of non-participants. Having a more positive opinion of the U.S., American ideas about democracy, American music, movies, and television, and desire to travel to the U.S. all were significantly associated with a more positive opinion about Americans.

Keywords: Educational programs, teacher education, personal epistemology, Jordan, USA.
Although America and the American culture is not a component of Jordan's educational system, it is implicitly integrated into how Jordanian students learn. English is the only foreign language taught in public schools and in most private schools, and language classes begin at the elementary level and continue until university. Both public and private universities use English in teaching sciences and business. Jordanian universities also give students exposure to American studies and American culture, though this varies depending upon major and professor. Outside academics, students often overhear or take part in discussions about regional politics involving U.S. policy. Jordanians are also exposed to a wide variety of American media in daily life through internet, music, movies, and television.

But what is the impact of this exposure on Jordanian perceptions of Americans? Learning a foreign language and understanding a foreign culture are not synonymous, and American media often reinforces stereotypes about the United States. In addition, U.S. foreign policy does not necessarily represent attitudes of the U.S. public. Ideally, educational programs such as classes or cultural exchanges would best represent the American people, as the purpose of these programs is to increase students' understanding of Americans. Yet it is difficult to determine how exposure to these programs affect Jordanian students' perception; no studies these authors found pursued this information. It is important that American cultural classes and related programs within Jordan's education system both accurately represent Americans and do so in a manner that best enables Jordanian students to learn and understand. This is critical not only as a measurement of success for these programs, but also as a life skill for Jordanian students to learn cross-cultural communication.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate how educational programs affect Jordanian students' perceptions of Americans through the case study of Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan. The focus was twofold: to document opinions about Americans and American-related topics, and to determine if various educational programs relating to Americans and opinions about American-related topics impact opinions about Americans themselves. The study compares students involved in cultural exchange programs to students not involved. However, common external methods of learning about Americans which shape the perception of these students were also investigated. These secondary means of learning will be compared to primary exposure to see to what extent various methods of learning impact Jordanian student perceptions.

Surveys were distributed to a purposefully selected student sample including both undergraduate and graduate students. In addition to responding to the survey questions, students were asked to add a written explanation for each of their responses. Surveys were conducted in July 2014.

Yarmouk University was chosen as a case study because it was best suited to the needs of the study. One of the authors (Gibson) studied a semester of Arabic through a cultural exchange program at Yarmouk University, and the co-author (Banihani) is a professor at Yarmouk University. In addition, Yarmouk is suited to the study as it is a prestigious university located outside the capital. Yarmouk is considered the second best university in Jordan. Its location in Irbid, Jordan, places it apart from the common tourist exposure in Amman, decreasing any confounding effect of exposures to tourist interactions.

According to Yarmouk University's own statistics, the university has a 35,000 student body, about 3,500 of which are non-Jordanian. Though these international students come from about 40 different countries, the majority are Malaysian or from nearby Arab states. The largest groups of international students are as follows: Malaysian (800), Saudi Arabian (400), Syrian (350), Bahraini (170), and Yemeni (160). In addition, throughout the year various American exchange programs bring students to Yarmouk, primarily for Arabic language programs, though these students are not officially enrolled.

This paper contains three sections: a literature review, study results, and a conclusion. The first section's literature review briefly explains general theory on cross-cultural perceptions, as well as providing background on pre-existing surveys and academia regarding Jordanian perceptions of Americans. The second section shows and explains the survey results. The final section highlights the important findings of the results and their significance, and
suggestions further expansions on this study for the future.

Literature Review

General Theory on Cross-Cultural Perception

A large body of studies is concerned with how different cultures perceive each other. First and foremost, it must be recognized that different cultures have different attitudinal and methodological perceptions (Kitayama, Duffy, Kawamura, and Larsen, 2003). This can create even fundamental differences in action, such as determining how a person tends to perform a given task. However, this response is not correlated to genetics, (as Herrnstein and Murray’s claim in “The Bell Curve”) (Herrnstein and Charles, 1994), but rather one’s surroundings. For example, a person of one culture, when exposed to the environment of a different culture, alters his/her tendency to perform a task to fit with the different culture.

The significance of this finding explains that, though initially cultures may exhibit small differences that seem foreign, people naturally adapt to their surroundings. In theoretical example, if Jordanians and Americans perform a task differently, when Americans visit Jordan, they began to perform the task in a more Jordanian manner, and vice versa. Though initially minute details of a person’s action may not fit with the culture or seem odd, eventually he/she will adapt to the new characteristics of a culture. The Bennett scale illustrates this in a continuum of adaptation in cultural relativism. It proposes five stages of adaptations that a sojourner will experience. Starting with denial of differences, these stages end with integration, in which a person can move between various worldviews (Bennett in Paige, 1993).

Based on this scale, one can assume Jordanian perceptions of Americans will be different depending upon the extent to which Americans have adapted to the new cultural nuances of their surroundings, and the extent to which Jordanians are able to accept that different American cultural nuances. The stage at which each Jordanian is at will affect his or her interpretation of both Americans in person and from secondary exposure, such as films. Culture is a determining factor both in social perception and the physiological response determining this perception (Freeman, Nicholas, and Ambady, 2009). In other words, how different cultures perceive is different: “In sum, one’s cultural background determines the engagement of a frontoparietal attentional network when making basic perceptual judgments” (Kitayama, Duffy, Kawamura, and Larsen, 2003, p. 195). This causes cultural differences in one’s ability to recognize emotions, making a person more capable of accurately recognizing emotions in his or her own culture (Elfenbein and Ambady, 2014, p.163).

Body language also carries different impact; though cultures uniformly assign certain movements certain meaning (i.e. nose wrinkling as disgust) the impression of that sign may have different significance. For example, a woman in America speaking quietly to the cashier and avoiding his eyes means that she is demure and shy, traits not valued in American culture, and so she is likely viewed in a negative light as annoying and difficult. The same soft-spoken woman in Jordan is also seen as demure and shy, but these traits are highly valued in women in Jordanian culture, and so she is likely viewed in a positive light as modest and good. However, just as different settings alter a person’s manner in which they perform a task, so too can a person learn to identify cultural emotions from other cultures; recognizing emotions is a learned, not inherent, trait (Elfenbein and Ambady, 2014).

Again, this has implications in our study because it signals both Jordanians and Americans may not be able to easily understand one another’s emotions. Additionally, they will likely put value on different traits, adding small confusion to action and communication. These potential misunderstandings effect how Jordanians interpret American actions, and vice versa.

The interpretation of language also differs between cultures, even if the same language is being spoken. According to a study of cross-cultural communication: “In many cases, different cultural expectations and practices can affect the way in which individuals from different cultures both present and interpret spoken or written information” (Uljen and Amant, 2000, p. 220). Therefore, not only physical American movements, but also written information about Americans, may be perceived differently between Jordanians and Americans.¹

¹Our survey addressed this issue by being mutually created by both an American and a Jordanian who were familiar with both Arabic and English.
Perception of another also relates directly to the group that person represents. It has been found that if a person is seen as a larger threat, racism towards that person increases (Falomir-Pichastor, Manuel, Muñoz-Rojas, Invernizzi, and Mugny, 2004). This relates to Jordanians because in Jordan, the U.S. is seen as a large threat to regional stability. According to a Brookings study in 2010, the U.S. is viewed as the second greatest threat by Middle Eastern countries (second to Israel) (Telhami, 2010).

Similarly, an American in Jordan may see Middle Easterners as a threat due to recent violence in the region. This may cause both parties to be racist against each other or act uncharacteristically in interaction. This is particularly important to consider because seeing a group as a threat may not be consciously recognized; implicit negative feelings towards groups have been shown without the person knowing they disliked a certain group (Freeman, Nicholas, and Ambady, 2009). If Jordanians or Americans do not know they are racist towards the other, then they may judge their perceptions to be unbiased when in fact they are.

The general theory behind cross-cultural perception shows that different cultures not only perceive in different ways, but attach different significance to the same action and perform the same task in different manners. Emotion, speech, and writings are interpreted differently. The more different the culture, the more pronounced this difference in interpretation. In addition, the group one is associated with has a heavy impact on how that person is perceived. Yet these differences are not necessarily genetic; one can learn how to better interpret a different culture. This potential lends support to the idea that accurate learning about Americans should enable Jordanians to perceive American culture more accurately and potentially use this perception in an operational capacity. However, as studying other culture may expose different possibilities, differences may also give rise to rejection of the other culture.

**Current Academia on Jordanian Perceptions of Americans**

Most data concerning Jordanian perceptions of Americans is collected in various opinion polls and surveys designed for Middle Eastern countries. Though none of these are Jordan specific, and therefore do not have substantial depth, selections from these studies provide groundwork and comparisons for our own findings. One of the best sources of data is the Pew Research Center’s (2002-2013a, b, c) Global Attitudes Project. Pew has been gracious enough to allow us to model from several questions in its research for our own survey, giving us a baseline for comparison purposes. These questions are: Do you have a favorable or unfavorable view of the American people? Do you have a favorable or unfavorable view of the U.S.? Is it good or bad that American ideas and customs are spreading here? Do you like or dislike American ideas about democracy? Do you like or dislike American music, movies and television? Table 1 and Figure 1 below summarize the Pew respondents’ views of the American people since 2002, and highlights the purpose of our own study (Pew Research Centre, 2002-2013b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
<th>Favorable (%)</th>
<th>Unfavorable (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>18</td>
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</tr>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>66</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 1 and Figure 1 show that Jordanians are currently more likely to view Americans negatively than positively, a trend which also holds true in the Pew results for American-related ideas. After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, opinions dropped steeply regarding American people and the state, but increased in positivity towards American democracy and media representations. However, opinions have become more positive since then.
It seems that the most influential factor in fostering negative opinion on Americans has been U.S. foreign policy. This finding has been repeated consistently throughout various studies. Specific points of contention with U.S. policy include the Iraq War, War on Terrorism, Israel alliance, and U.S. intervention without considering regional effects (Kohut, 2005; Telhami, 2010). In 2002 and 2003, after the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. was less popular in the Middle East than anywhere else in the world (Kohut, 2005). The issue of Israel’s alliance with the U.S. is also a hot point of contention throughout the Middle East and mars the U.S. and American image in the eyes of Jordanians, particularly as over half of their population is of Palestinian origin (Telhami, 2010).

Has what Jordanians view as American is political mistakes recently established increased negativity towards Americans? A June 2014 poll found that 18% of Jordanians had favorable views of the U.S., and 75% had unfavorable views (Zogby Research Services, 2014). Based on the Pew 2013 data listed in Table 1, this is a 10% increase in unfavorable views towards the U.S. If politically related, this could be a sign of raised discontent with the rise of ISIS in Iraq. This turn of negativity in opinion could show that Jordanians blame Iraq’s spillover violence on the U.S. for not establishing stability.

The relation of U.S. policy to American opinion is especially critical to consider for the time period of this study. During the summer of 2014, tensions between Israelis and Palestinians were especially high because of the on-going war. As a result, many Jordanian sentiments were likely affected by the media surrounding the war between Gaza and Israel, which therefore may have affected their survey responses, as America and Israel are known to be allies. The surveyors recognize this study was conducted at a time when tensions were uncharacteristically high. In order to anticipate this potential effect, Yarmouk professors were asked about what they thought the effect the ongoing politics would have on the survey. Each professor replied similarly: through a few students would allow the current politics to affect their opinion on Americans, the large majority of student opinions on Americans would not be affected.

Yet outside politics, there are several additional theories as to why Jordanians may perceive Americans negatively. Perhaps the most famous theory supporting the idea of negative perceptions is the Clash of Civilizations theory which portrays Islam and the West as natural enemies (Tessler and Robbins, 2007). However, there was a large backlash against this theory, and Said called it a “gimmick” and staunchly decry the idea (Said, 2001).

In addition to such theories, there are several studies which concentrate on why people express anti-American sentiments. Multiple traits have been shown, hypothesized, and argued to be correlated to anti-Americanism, among them economic situation, religiousness, and government mistrust, but the extent to which each may or may not be related is still debated.

It is also important to consider the reality that stereotypes about Americans in the Middle Eastern world are often rampant and negative (PBS, 2002). Westerners are portrayed as rich, hypocritical, having few values, and promiscuous. Again, this may be a response to the large threat level the U.S. has in the Middle East; but it may also be that stereotypes abound in popular media. To clarify, it is often the American media itself that perpetuates these stereotypes, not Middle Eastern media. For example, shows on MTV are well-known, and though they come from American culture, they also project and reinforce multiple
stereotypes about American culture. The championing of exorbitant lifestyles and idolized celebrities in America are rampant, and anyone with the internet can access this phenomenon. Though the access to internet in the study population is unknown, the street running alongside Yarmouk University purportedly has more internet cafes than any other street in the world, and social media has increased hugely in popularity within the Arab world. Therefore, it is estimated that the majority of Jordanians interviewed do have access to internet resources.

Current academia on Jordanian perceptions of Americans and related associations shows that these perceptions are generally negative, though Pew data shows they may be importing with time. Jordanian opinions are heavily based on U.S. foreign policy in the region, though also have exposure to stereotypes in novels and media. Almost no studies have been done on Jordanian exposure to actual Americans and how this may affect impressions. The Arab American Institute, however, did conduct a study on Jordanian exposure to Americans, but it was done in 2004 and was rather small (AAI, 2004). And again, no studies these authors found considered how Jordanians learned about Americans as a factor affecting opinion. Overall, there is much hypothesized but little known about how Jordanian impressions are influenced outside of U.S. foreign policy.

Method

This study is based on a survey distributed at Yarmouk University. Specifically, it was distributed to a purposeful sample of undergraduate and graduate classes based on personal contact with some instructors. The survey was given to six different classes, four of them in the Education Department and two in the Language Center where American students attend Arabic language programs. Gibson was a previous participant in one of these programs. In total, 164 questionnaires were distributed, of which 153 student responses were collected. Eleven questionnaires were discarded due to students reporting that they were non-Jordanians. Of these, 38 students had been or were involved in cross-cultural exchange programs with Americans from either the University of Virginia Arabic Program or the CET Intensive Arabic Language Program at Yarmouk. The cross cultural programs only involve Americans in Jordan but do not involve Jordanians who have been in the U.S. In both of these programs, survey responders either acted as language partners, roommates, or worked in some other capacity with the American students visiting Yarmouk University. Additional students counted within the cross-cultural exchange group were from the greater population surveyed who responded “yes” to the question, “Have you participated in an exchange program with Americans?”

Undergraduate students were surveyed from a “Principles of Education” class, or a “Civic of Education” class, both university requirements. Masters students were surveyed from an Education MA requirement and English instructions class. Classes were selected from within the Education Department because graduate students in this department come from a wide variety of majors and therefore contribute different backgrounds to the study.

Students were given approximately fifteen minutes in class to fill out the survey, which involved both multiple choice and free response questions. Questions concerned basic demographic information, means of learning about Americans, exposure to Americans, and opinions on Americans and topics related to Americans. To determine opinions on Americans, survey participants were given questions with five options (see Table 2) in ascending order from “very negative” to “very positive”, with “no opinion” in the middle.

Results

Table 2 describes characteristics of the participants, overall and by exchange participation status. Numbers reported as percentages are actual percentages within the category. As not all respondents answered all questions, not all percentages totals add up to 100.

Chi-squared tests were used to compare the study groups. Total percentages are reported for each variable, as well as the extent of its significance. Factors found to be significant were included in a multivariate linear regression model, with the dependent variable being opinion of Americans. A post-hoc power calculation was performed on the variables in the regression. The mean opinion about Americans, as well as its significance, is also presented. Table 2 shows the demographic information of participants and source of learning about Americans.
The only statistically significant differences between the group characteristics were in “Gender” and “Classes Taken on Americans.” The cultural exchange group contained about 13 percentage points more males, and was about twice as likely to take classes on Americans (2 out of 10 versus 1 out of 10). However, neither of these variables was significantly associated with opinion of Americans in the multivariate regression and therefore were deemed to not largely affect the overall outcome on this opinion.

Though both males and females had about equal representation in the total study, there were about 13 percentage points more males than females in the exchange group. Undergraduate students made up the majorities of all groups, and held a large majority of cross-cultural exchange students (above 80%). All groups were largely composed of Jordanian students. A significant difference between groups was in how confident students were in their knowledge about Americans; a higher portion of exchange students (48%) reported high confidence than did non-exchange students (18%). Means of learning shared relatively similar percentage distribution, though exchange participants reported learning far more from Americans in Jordan, and far less from the internet and news, than non-exchange participants. Cultural exchange students also took more classes on Americans, and were the only students to report having studied in America.

The participation of a student in a cultural exchange program was found to not have a significant effect on opinion of Americans as shown in Table 3. The exchange program participants surveyed reported a greater proportion of “very positive” opinions of Americans, and did not hold “very negative” opinions of Americans, but these differences were not statistically significant. A post-hoc power calculation of the general linear model showed that if the true difference was that cultural exchange students had a 6% more positive opinion score regarding Americans, a study with this sample size has an observed power of 26% to find a statistically significant difference in opinion. In other words, this study had about a 1 in 4 chance of finding a relationship between exchange programs and opinion of Americans, if the actual difference was 6%. Table 3 shows the cultural exchange and non-cultural exchange students’ opinion of Americans.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion on Americans (%)</th>
<th>Cultural Exchange</th>
<th>Non-Cultural Exchange</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Negative</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Positive</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences were not statistically significant in chi-square test

Opinion on topics related to Americans all had significant relationships with opinion of Americans as shown in Table 4. As seen in Table 4, each had statistically significant
results, with \( p < 0.01 \) or less. In the multivariate regression a more positive opinion of the U.S., American ideas about democracy, American music, movies, and television (hereafter referred to as American media), and desire to travel to the U.S. all were significantly associated with a more positive opinion about Americans. Most notably, opinion of the U.S. and opinion of American media was strongly associated with positive opinion of Americans (\( p \leq 0.001 \)).

Exchange students were less likely to report “negative” or “no opinion” regarding American media, having about a 10% difference in both groups compared to non-exchange students; exchange students had about a 25% higher total reporting very positive opinions. Desire to travel to America also exhibited a large difference in percentage distributions between groups, where non-exchange students wanted to travel to America more than exchange students, with an about 10% difference in total.

The five response options (very negative to very positive) are grouped into three groups of “negative”, “no opinion”, and “positive.”

The only statistically significant difference between group means was in the category of “Confidence in Knowledge about Americans,” meaning the average confidence in knowledge about Americans was higher in exchange participants than the confidence of non-participants Table 5. When comparing average opinions on Americans and related questions, exchange participants reported on average more positive opinions in cultural categories, but more negative opinions in governmental categories. The largest variation between categories was in confidence of knowledge about Americans, where exchange students felt 0.77 points more positively about their knowledge than non-exchange students. Exchange students also felt more positively about American movies, music, and television, American customs and ideas spreading in Jordan, and Americans, at a difference of 0.41, 0.26, and 0.23, points respectively. However, exchange participants felt more negatively about the U.S. and American ideas about democracy, though these were less than a 0.20 difference.

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion on Topics Related to Americans (%)</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Exchange</th>
<th>Non-Exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Ideas about Democracy***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>56.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Ideas and Customs Spreading in Jordan**</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American movies, music, and television***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would like to travel to America***</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** \( p < 0.01 \) for Chi-squared test comparing Cultural Exchange to Non-Cultural Exchange groups

*** \( p < 0.001 \) for Chi-squared test comparing Cultural Exchange to Non-Cultural Exchange groups

### Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Opinion on Topics Related to Americans</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Cultural Exchange</th>
<th>Non-Cultural Exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average opinion score about...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americans</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American ideas about Democracy</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Customs and Ideas Spreading in Jordan</td>
<td>-0.63</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>-0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Movies, Music, and TV</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in Knowledge about Americans***</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scale –2 (very negative opinion) to 2 (very positive opinion)

*** \( p < 0.001 \) for a t-test comparing Cultural Exchange to Non-Cultural Exchange groups, equal variances assumed

In a multivariate linear model that simultaneously adjusted for the factors shown in Table 6, (i.e., the factors found to have chi-squared significance), opinion about Americans was significantly associated with opinions of the U.S., with American ideas about democracy, with American customs and ideas spreading in Jordan, with American movies, music, and TV, and with travel to America. When opinion on each of these variables increased by one point on a five point scale, opinion on Americans increased 0.31, 0.13, 0.21, and 0.35 points respectively (also on a five point scale). In other words, each of the four mentioned factors
had a positive association with what students thought of Americans. Travel to America and opinion about the U.S. were associated with the most positive effect.

Table 6
Post-Hoc Power Calculation of General Linear Model for Significant Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>95% Confidence Variables</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in Knowledge</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taken Classes on Americans</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel to America* U.S.***</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion of American Ideas about Democracy**</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Customs and Ideas Spreading in Jordan</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Movies, Music, and TV**</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Scale -2 (very negative opinion) to 2 (very positive opinion)
* p < 0.05 for Chi-squared test comparing Cultural Exchange to Non-Cultural Exchange groups
** p < 0.01 for Chi-squared test comparing Cultural Exchange to Non-Cultural Exchange groups
*** p < 0.001 for Chi-squared test comparing Cultural Exchange to Non-Cultural Exchange groups

Written Responses

Respondents were asked to justify their answers to each opinion question and the means of learning question, in addition to having space to write additional comments. A random sample of these responses was considered for this analysis. The findings of our study largely confirmed the aforementioned academic literature regarding cross-cultural communication and Jordanian opinion polls.

The differences in culture and cultural interpretations were exemplified through a negative opinion of the U.S. and American customs and ideas spreading in Jordan. Many Jordanians noted that the cultural appropriation of American culture in Jordan was misused, and often only negative aspects that contradicted Jordanian culture were adapted: “unfortunately most customs are transferred blindly and in the end will be negative,” and “I am not against customs and traditions of Americans. But I am against the blind imitation.” The “blind imitation” phrase appeared numerous times in survey responses, showing that idea of American customs and ideas spreading appeared to be negative not necessarily because of a negative opinion of these traits, but because they were poorly and incorrectly imitated within Jordanian culture. The commentary on different social perceptions of the same action also clarified this point, “I like people who live their life as they want. Their life is pretty and progressive and people do not intervene in other people’s lives... They can exchange conversations with each other. But this is strange and not allowed in our culture, and of course it is wrong.” Though American customs and ideas seemed to be valued by respondents, their spreading in Jordan was viewed overall as negative due to the idea that they were incorrectly represented and therefore contrary to the culture.

The racism expected from threatened groups was also prevalent in survey responses, showing both sides of the issue: Jordanian racism against Americans seen as threats, and citing of racist Americans who viewed Jordanians as a threat. Racism was much more prevalent in non-exchange student responses, which may also explain the fact none of them held “very negative” opinions of Americans. Survey responses were also dominated by stereotypes about Americans, such as: “respectful of time, faithful at work, seek knowledge, optimistic.” Jordanians also often self-identified with stereotypes, such as “generous, kind, courageous, strong family ties.” The grand majority of respondents did not identify any negative traits with Jordanians; though there were some negative stereotypes about Americans, these varied. The prevalence of stereotypes within responses is justified, in American traits, by the overall low confidence in knowledge about Americans that students reported. Some students withheld their opinions with the reasoning that they did not personally know any Americans.

Though many students recognized they did not know much about Americans, many had strong opinions of the U.S. Comments confirmed the study finding of that opinion of the U.S. influenced opinion of Americans, and that politics played a large role in opinion of the U.S. Sometimes, students would justify a

3 Including 10 respondents from each class or program; 50 surveys total.
negative opinion of Americans by citing reasons they disliked the U.S. Survey comments mainly focused on the larger pattern of U.S. intervention in Middle Eastern countries in general, sometimes on perceived bias against Arab Muslims. Israel was sometimes mentioned; “I explained earlier that my answer [on opinion of the U.S.] is negative because of the American interference in other countries, especially its destruction of the Arab countries and its support to Israel.” Yet the political nature may not be entirely due to the fact that Jordanians seek to integrate politics, but because they are integrated into everyday life. Many Jordanians cited ease of access for their reasons of choosing various means of learning, particularly for news and internet users. Because both of these sites are highly political, this may contribute to the association of U.S. opinion with politics.

Curiously, responses about American democracy were positive overall, though this also played into the perception of politics. Many students offered stereotypical reasons of freedom for their positivity, “Democracy is represented by respect of opinion and the opinion of the other the election of the representatives in the government, and the freedom of speech, all these are guaranteed in America.” However, a large portion also commented about how the U.S. limits its democracy to its own citizens: “They apply it to themselves but not to the rest of the world.” The de jure idea of democracy was seen in a very positive light, while its de facto application was viewed negatively.

However, opinions on Americans overall, from cultural exchange students, and from non-cultural exchange students, were positive. In-person interactions students had with Americans seemed to largely affect their opinion: “As people, they are great. It is different from what we were expecting from the name ‘America’ which is scary and threatening, and it is the reason behind destruction in the Arab countries.” Exchange students with this exposure also had a higher tendency of distinguishing Americans from the U.S. in their responses than non-exchange students. This may explain the exchange student tendency to have higher opinions in cultural categories than non-exchange students.

Yet in both student groups, films were the most often cited means of learning about Americans, and had a significant relationship with opinion on Americans. When discussing the reasoning behind learning from films, students expressed general belief that this media accurately represented American life: “they provide knowledge about how Americans live and deal with different situations in their life, and give us a good idea about the natural and practical life of Americans.” Ease of availability was also often cited as reasoning behind learning the most from films. As opinion of American media was one of the variables most strongly associated with positive American perception, it seems that most of these students not only learned from media, but formed positive opinions from it.

Conclusion

Summary and Significance of Results

The participation of a student in a cultural exchange program was found not to be significantly associated with opinion about Americans. The exchange program participants surveyed reported a greater proportion of “very positive” opinions of Americans, and did not hold “very negative” opinions of Americans, but these differences were not statistically significant. When comparing average opinions about Americans and related questions, exchange participants reported on average more positive opinions in cultural categories, but more negative opinions in governmental categories. The only statistically significance difference between group means was in the category of “Confidence in Knowledge about Americans,” meaning the average confidence in knowledge about Americans was higher in exchange participants than the confidence of non-participants. This may have been due to direct learning, as exchange students were more likely to report this means, when non-exchange students were more likely to report learning from the internet or news. By examining general demographic trends, it seems that exchange participants in the study sample had a greater tendency for direct learning about Americans, such as making contact and taking

4 These being opinion of Americans, opinion of American customs and ideas spreading in Jordan, and opinion of American movies, music, and TV.
5 These being opinion of U.S. and opinion of American ideas about democracy.
classes, than those who did not participate in programs. This relationship with involvement could be a cause, or effect, of students participating in such programs. In other words, students involved in exchanges may already be predisposed to participate in direct learning about Americans, or conversely, direct learning may cause students to seek out additional direct learning.

However, in both exchange and non-exchange groups, films were the most common means of learning about Americans (reported by about 22% overall), possibly due to their accessibility and a belief that they accurately represent American life. Opinion about American music, movies, and television also was related to opinion about Americans; those with one point (25%) higher opinion on this American media also had a 5% higher opinion score of Americans. Classes, both at the school and university levels, were largely not reported as a method of learning about Americans, though this may partially be due to the fact that only 13% of students reported taking classes on Americans.

In addition to opinion about American media, variables significantly associated with a positive opinion about Americans were opinion about American ideas about democracy, desire to travel to the U.S. and opinion about the U.S. Our study reconfirmed the common finding in similar research that politics play a large role in opinion of the U.S.; survey comments supported this point by often mentioning U.S. intervention in Middle Eastern countries. Yet not all U.S. government aspects were disliked; the de juis idea of American democracy was seen in a very positive light, though its de facto application was viewed negatively. Mistranslation of cultures was also prevalent, as American customs and ideas seemed to be valued by respondents, but these aspects spreading in Jordan was viewed overall as negative due to the idea that they were incorrectly represented in a manner contrary to the culture. In a related vein, both groups used stereotypes in their responses, though these were more prevalent in non-participants and may have been explained by a low confidence in knowledge.

Suggestions for Further Study

As films are the most commonly reported method of learning about Americans, a deeper analysis of their effect on this learning is suggested. Our findings show that a higher opinion of media relates to a higher opinion of Americans, so to better perception of Americans in the region, perhaps access to more representational movies would ease and facilitate better learning about American culture. Studies pursuing this potential are suggested.

A more expansive study of exchange participants is also recommended. A large enough sample size was not available during the time our study was conducted due to the limited number of students participating in exchange programs, so potentially meaningful associations may have gone undetected by our study. The higher average opinion on Americans, in addition to the higher caliber of survey responses of exchange participants, indicates to the potential for an important impact on students from these programs.

In addition, studies at different universities across Jordan are also suggested to expand the variety and number of respondents. Due to Gibson’s former participation in one of the cross-cultural exchange programs, and Banihani’s current position as a Yarmouk professor, it is understood that these associations may have unconsciously affected student respondents, though students were in no way required or pressured to participate in any capacity.

References


The Effect of Group Counselling Based on the Modification of Negative Self-Statements on Reducing Gender-Biased Foreign Language Anxiety among Ajloun National University Students

Mohammad H. Abood* & Nadia Ahouari-idri
Hashemite University, Jordan & University of Bejaia, Algeria

Abstract: This study investigated the effectiveness of a training program, based on the modification of negative self-statement, to reduce foreign language anxiety (FLA) among EFL students at university in Jordan. To achieve this goal, the foreign language classroom anxiety scale was used. Participants were 30 male and female students from Ajloun National University, who scored high in FLA, and randomly dispensed to one of the two groups: experimental and control. The experimental group received a pilot programme to modify the negative self-statement and the control group did not. Results showed that the modification of negative self-statement program (MNSP) was effective in reducing FLA. A statistically significant difference (.05) was found between the two groups in the effectiveness of the self-statement programme.

Keywords: Foreign language, foreign language anxiety, negative self-statement, negative self-statement programme.

Abstract: هذه الدراسة استقصت فاعلية برنامج تدريبي يستند إلى تعديل صور الذات السلبية في تخفيض قلق تعلم اللغة الأجنبية عند طلبة جامعة عجلون الوطنية. تم استخدام مقياس قلق اللغة الأجنبية، حسب برنامج تدريبي يتم في جامعة عجلون الوطنية، وتم تقسيم العينة بين طلبيين: مجموعة تدريبية ومجموعة الضابطة، حيث تم تقييمهم عشوائياً إلى مجموعتين. نجحت المجموعة التجريبية في تخفيض قلق اللغة الأجنبية، بينما لم تنجح المجموعة الضابطة في تخفيض قلق اللغة الأجنبية. وظهرت النتائج إرشادية لavaşق فاعلية برنامج تعديل صور الذات السلبية، حيث تحقق/V vaccت النتائج ومن خلال ذلك دلالة إحصائية (.05) لفعاليته وفعالية برنامج تعديل صور الذات السلبية. نgoritت النتائج دلالة إحصائية (.05) لفعالية برنامج تعديل صور الذات السلبية، حيث تحقق/V vaccت النتائج ومن خلال ذلك دلالة إحصائية (.05) لفعاليته وفعالية برنامج تعديل صور الذات السلبية. نgoritت النتائج دلالة إحصائية (.05) لفعالية برنامج تعديل صور الذات السلبية، حيث تحقق/V vaccت النتائج ومن خلال ذلك دلالة إحصائية (.05) لفعالية برنامج تعديل صور الذات السلبية.

Keywords: اللغة الأجنبية، قلق تعلم اللغة الأجنبية، صور الذات السلبية، برنامج تعديل صور الذات السلبية.

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The term anxiety is not specific to language learning. In clinical psychology, when considered as a severe illness, it is called generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). In clinical psychology, anxiety is translated into its symptoms. In this paper, the authors regard FLA as an affective variable; i.e., as a psycho-physiological phenomenon explained by inherent and apparent features.

In foreign language learning (FLL), affective factors have been studied since the 1970s by several researchers (e.g., Aida, 1994; Garcia-Marques & Loureiro, 2016; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Wright, Hopwood & Simms, 2015; Yamashita, 2015). Among the affective variables, anxiety is a main blocking factor for effective language learning (Sultan, 2012; Tanielian, 2014). Anxiety has been treated differently by scholars, whether as a cause of learning (Mejía, 2014), or as a consequence of learning (Liao & Wang, 2015; Mejía, 2014; Sultan, 2012). Anxiety is a highly influential factor in foreign language teaching and learning contexts. It is indeed to such a context that researchers defend the thesis that FLA is debilitating and focus on how to cope with it for better learning.

Being aware of the damaging effects of negative affect that stem from the inherent feelings in the individual, debilitating anxiety can be caused by negative self-statements. Students can go through internal speech related to learning the foreign language and negatively self-evaluate themselves or their performance. Self-evaluation has been focused of researchers since the 1960s because it contributes to effective and active learning (Idri, 2014). However, in case self-evaluations are negative, learners often become apprehensive toward the foreign language when their beliefs are negative toward themselves. In relation to FLA, Horwitz et al. (1986) defined it as “a distinct complex of self-perception, beliefs feelings and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 125). Hence, when foreign language learners perceive themselves negatively and feel bad about themselves, anxiety can be high. When learners, then, feel bad towards themselves, their negative self-statements are more likely to develop leading to further anxiety. As an efficient technique to help learners overcome anxiety, the authors suggested a counseling technique based on the modification of negative self-statements.

Several researchers (e.g., Al-Khasawneh, 2016; Garcia-Marques & Loureiro, 2016; Liao & Wang, 2015; Mejía, 2014; Mohammed, 2015; Sultan, 2012; Tanielian, 2014; Yamashita, 2015) mentioned that anxiety is one of the affective variables that influences teaching and learning in different individuals and contexts. Horwitz et al. (1986) claimed that anxiety specific to FLA exists and it is associated with the three concepts: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. To treat these varieties, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was developed to frame the anxiety response to a foreign language situation on the one hand, and to measure the three performance anxieties on the other. Horwitz et al. (1986) found that there was a significant correlation between anxiety and its varieties. Foreign Language Anxiety showed its effect on other learning variables like grades (Idri, 2012) and performance (Tanielian, 2014).

Research has always tried to discover the relationship between anxiety and other variables. In addition, many trials are in progress to find ways out to reduce this phenomenon in language classes (Deb, 2016; Liao & Wang; Tanielian, 2014; Martirossian1 and Hartoonian, 2015). However, few attempted to test the effectiveness of a treatment programme to help foreign language learners cope with it. As an attempt to find an effective programme, this study comes to test the effectiveness of one of the counseling programmes that cope with FLA; the Modification of Negative Self-Statement Programme (MNSP). Such a Programme is one of the methods of psychological therapy that is based on teaching individuals how to replace negative self-thoughts with positive ones throughout a 10 sessions’ psychological programme. Experimental studies that try to test the effectiveness of modifying negative self-statements in reducing FLA are occasional. Yet, they are needed to be part of the FLL training in order to accompany students who suffer from FLA. The tested programme was applied in a FLL context with university students at Ajloun National University, Jordan. The present study attempts to test the following hypotheses:
1. There are statistically significant differences in favour of the experimental group in treating FLA compared to the control group.

2. There are statistically significant differences due to gender in the experimental group’s performance in the treatment of FLA.

Method

The study at hand used an experimental design based on two groups; one experimental and one control containing 15 students each. The adopted counselling programme is the independent variable of the research. It was applied as a treatment to the experimental group in order to test its role in reducing FLA among students. Hence, both groups were subjected to pre- and post-test measurements to compare the results. This makes the employed method purely quantitative.

Participants

The sample of the study consists of 30 students who had high scores on the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS), and agreed to participate in the study. Participants were divided into two groups, an experimental group and a control group of 15 students each. Members of the experimental group were trained on adjusting negative self-statements whereas members of the control group were not subjected to this treatment. The overall number of students at Ajloun National University is 1550 male and female bachelor students who study during the first semester of the academic year 2014-2015.

Instruments

The Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The authors first used Hortwitz, Horwitz and Cope’s FLCAS which consists of 33 items based on a five Likert-type scale: 0: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree. The lowest score on the scale can be 0 and the highest can be 165. The scale was translated from English into Arabic. Both versions were reviewed by specialists in educational psychology, counselling and English. They were required to review the items in terms of language style and clarity of the meaning for each item. Based on their feedback, modifications related to a number of items were applied.

In terms of reliability, Horwitz et al.’s (1986, p. 129) FLCAS proved to be a reliable instrument. It achieved an alpha coefficient of 0.93. In terms of the scale’s validity, many researchers (e.g., Aida, 1994; Gi-Pyo Park, 2014; Horwitz, 2016) found the scale valid in their studies. As concerns its reliability in the present study, the Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient was 0.82.

Modification of Negative Self-statements Programme: Description and Procedure

The authors applied the MNSP on the experimental group via 12 treatment sessions; three sessions per week (the programme is considered valid at the level of ten sessions and more). Each session lasted 50 minutes. The sessions aimed at helping students suffering from FLA to get rid of the negative self-talk that leads to anxiety, and substitute it with a more positive talk that stimulates the self in foreign language contexts.

The Description of the Sessions

Session 1. This session is introductory to let the counsellor and the members of the group know each other. The session aims also at introducing the collective counselling technique, presenting the programme objectives, delimiting the standards of group work and identifying the members’ expectations and receiving the members’ approval to take part in the programme.

Session 2. This session aims to define the concept of foreign language anxiety (FLA), its causes, its effects and how to cope with it.

Session 3. The aim of this session is to adjust the first negative self-statement, show that it is illogical and substitute it with a more logical expression: “It is impossible to master the foreign language.”

Session 4. The aim of this session is to adjust the second negative self-statement, show that it is illogical and substitute it with a more logical expression: “I feel embarrassed and confused when I make errors in the foreign language in front of others.”

Session 5. The aim of this session is to adjust the third negative self-statement, show that it is illogical and substitute it with a more logical expression: “This age is not suited me to learn the foreign language.”

Session 6. The aim of this session is to adjust the fourth negative self-statement, show that it is illogical and substitute it with a more logical expression: “This age is suited me to learn the foreign language.”
expression: “I do not need to learn the foreign language.”

Session 7. The aim of this session is to adjust the fifth negative self-statement, show that it is illogical and substitute it with a more logical expression: “I extremely dislike the foreign language.”

Session 8. The aim of this session is to adjust the sixth negative self-statement, show that it is illogical and substitute it with a more logical expression: “Learning a foreign language needs many years of study.”

Session 9. The aim of this session is to adjust the seventh negative self-statement, show that it is illogical and substitute it with a more logical expression: “I should be very careful because I feel afraid of making errors when speaking the foreign language.”

Session 10. The aim of this session is to adjust the eighth negative self-statement, show that it is illogical and substitute it with a more logical expression: “I feel angry when I find that others learn the foreign language better than me.”

Session 11. The aim of this session is to adjust the ninth negative self-statement, show that it is illogical and substitute it with a more logical expression: “Learning a foreign language needs a level of intelligence.”

Session 12. This is the final session. Its aim is to review what was done in the programme, connect between the sessions, identify the members’ reactions towards the programme and finally thank the members of their commitments in attending the sessions. The researcher also ended the session by urging the members for a future follow up in case of need or advice.

Procedure

At the beginning, the scale was administered to experts after its translation. Then, it was piloted to check its consistency. The scale was, then, administered to the research sample. According to the scale’s results, authors could select the students who got the highest levels of FLA, who volunteered to take part in the study. The control group was subject of treatment and participated in the collective treatment programme to reduce FLA. The programme was made up of twelve sessions and lasted four weeks. The first researcher played the role of the counsellor. At the end of the last session, post-test measurement was processed.

Results

To test the two hypotheses of the study, the following statistical procedures were used:

- Calculation of means and standard deviations of the FLCAS levels among the members.
- Independent samples: T-test was used in order to find out the difference in FLA attributed to group and gender.

Table 1 shows results of the pre-test. Means and standard deviations are indicated for both groups. In addition, a t-test was used as an independent test to indicate statistical differences between the means.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.430</td>
<td>-2.284</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>.387</td>
<td>-2.284</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows no statistical significance (0.05) for the group variable (experimental/control) where the t-test value was -2.284 with .028 of statistical significance. This result shows equivalence between the groups.

Hypothesis 1: There are statistically significant differences (0.05) in favour of the experimental group to treat FLA compared to the control group. To test the hypothesis, means and standard deviations for both groups; experimental and control, for post-test FLA were calculated. In order to find out the statistical differences between the mean scores, a t-test was used. Results are displayed in Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.314</td>
<td>-3.706</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.373</td>
<td>-3.706</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows no statistical significance (0.05) for the group variable (experimental/control) where t-test value was -3.706 with .001 statistical significance.

Hypothesis 2: There are statistically significant differences (0.05) for gender in favour of
the experimental group to treat FLA compared to the control group.

To test the hypothesis, mean scores and standard deviations for post-test FLA according to sex were calculated. In order to find out the statistical differences between mean scores, a t-test was used. Results are displayed in Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.330</td>
<td>-2.728</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

Results showed that there exists a statistical variance between the experimental group and the control group. This indicated that reducing FLA was more efficient with the self-adjustment programme than not using it among students. This shows that the first hypothesis related to the group variable is verified. This can explain the efficiency of using the counselling programme to reduce FLA among university students. Hence, FLA can be treated by adopting the Programme since it plays a role in the individual’s motivation and self-confidence.

Self-talk plays a major role in one’s thoughts, emotions and behaviours. Hence, when dealing with negative self-talk and working on them, discussing them and trying to transform them into positive thoughts, the individual is more likely to have a more positive self-image and sees the Self in stigmatic shape. This leads the individual to gain more self-confidence in himself and improve his willingness to learn the foreign language and, eventually, work on diminishing the degree of fear and apprehension. On the other hand, the individual with negative self-statements perceives himself negatively and feels apprehension when learning a foreign language and, thus, affects the way he learns it negatively. In this, the anxiety felt in such a situation is debilitating to the learning enterprise. That is why counselling programmes can be efficient to lower the level of FLA through the modification of negative self-statements learners hold in FLA. Such programmes are important as they offer counselling services to learners who suffer from FLA and this is in order to improve the positive self-statements in them. This is because negative self-statements are a predictor of anxiety (Kendall & Treadwell, 1996).

This hypothesis results indicated there exists a statistical variance between male and female in terms of self-talk. Males use more self-talk compared to females. In this, females are more likely to seek other communicative channels to express what they suffer from in relation to negative feelings and thoughts vis-à-vis the external world and without refuge to repression or ongoing self-talk. However, males resort to self-talk and think of the situations they face deliberately. Hence, males choose self-talk more often compared to females. This characteristic lead them adopt negative self-talks from which the foreign language learning situation is part of. That is why the MNSP as a supportive way to students in order to modify the negative thoughts they might have adopted towards learning the foreign language. Such male students’ interaction opportunities with the programme was higher compared to female students.

**Implications and Suggestions**

In the light of the findings the authors reached, they recommend:

- Employ the modification of negative self-statement programme to treat students who suffer from FLA as shown through the results of the present study about the efficiency of this programme.
- Conduct further studies to experience the efficiency of other counselling programmes that aim at treating FLA in students.
- Organize regular training sessions and workshops to education counsellors and educational psychologists in order to cope with FLA when cases appear in educational settings.
- Replicate the experiment with a larger sample, in different contexts, with different age groups and at different educational levels. This will more likely permit to generalize the MNSP programme and adjust it to the context where it needs be applied.
The Effect of group counselling based on the Modification of Negative Self-Statements
Mohammad H. Abood & Nadia Ahouari-idri

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The Impact of Using Reading Storybooks and Writing Journal Activities on Print and Phonemic Awareness of Jordanian Kindergarten Children

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Abstract: This study investigated the impact of reading storybooks and writing journal activities on print and phonemic awareness of Jordanian kindergarten children. Subjects participated in book-reading sessions with a print focus, and writing journals. A total of 50 children were recruited for the study from one kindergarten in Irbid City, Jordan. Two intact sections of 25 children each served as experimental and control groups. Pre-test measures of children's print and phonemic awareness were administered. Subsequently, children in the experimental group participated in 24 small-group reading sessions that included a print focus, and 14 writing journals over a 14-week period. As an alternate condition, control-group children participated in conventional instruction methods only. Post-testing indicated that children who participated in print-focused reading and writing journal sessions outperformed their control group peers on four measures of print awareness (words in print, print concepts, alphabet knowledge and letter discrimination, and literacy terms), and on phonemic awareness (letter sound identification, rhyme, phoneme blending, phoneme segmentation, and phonemic manipulation), as well as overall performance. Implications and future research directions are discussed.

Keywords: Writing journals, emergent literacy, print awareness, phonemic awareness, Jordan, kindergarten.

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According to a national survey conducted by the Jordanian Ministry of Education in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development that included an early grade reading assessment, only 17% of Jordanian children from the second to third grade were able to read the full text and respond correctly to 80% or more comprehension questions (USAID, 2012). Undoubtedly, reading and writing are crucial elements in the education of any child. Reading skills are important to success in school and any future work as well. Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) said, “Along with elementary arithmetic, reading and writing are the objectives of basic instruction, and their learning is condition of success or failure in school” (p. 1).

Parents and early childhood educators want children to become good readers and writers. They are fully aware of how crucial reading and writing skills are to school success (Noe, Spencer, Kruse & Goldstein, 2014). However, according to Dickinson and Tabors (2001), parents and early childhood educators may not know how important language development is in preparing preschool-aged children for later literacy development. Dickinson and Tabors (2001) added, “More work has shown strong relationships between children’s early language skills and later reading abilities” (p. 3). Furthermore, they argued, “These verbal infractions during book reading promote the development of a cluster of language skills that children will be expected to use in school” (p. 49). The authors found evidence that “both the quantity and quality of book reading that occur are associated with language performance” (p. 48).

Past research has established the critical role of phonemic awareness in the development of beginning reading (Dee Nichols, Rupley, Rickelman, & Algozzine, 2004; Edwards, & Taub, 2016; Manyak, 2008; Kelley, Roe, Blanchard, & Atwill, 2015; Kilpatrick, 2012; Noe et al., 2014; Yopp & Yopp, 2000). For example, Manyak (2008) said:

“Phonemic awareness contributes centrally to children’s acquisition of the alphabetic principle—the understanding that the letters of the alphabet represent phonemes in speech. This understanding makes early phonics instruction useful for children and facilitates children’s ability to blend letter sounds while decoding words, to learn sight words reliably, and to spell phonetically. (p. 659)

In the last twenty years, the importance of phonological awareness in children’s early reading achievement has been clearly established (Wagner & Torgesen, 1987). In this study, phonemic awareness was used to indicate ability to analyze (e.g., segment) the individual sounds of words. Phonemic awareness refers to knowledge of the sounds of printed letters or words and how letters and words come together to make sounds (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg, & Beeler, 1998; Edwards, & Taub, 2016). This is helped as children begin to recognize familiar words on street signs and books at home (Armbruster, 2003). Phonetic awareness is a child’s awareness of the sound structure of speech. Under phonological research, instruction should be from larger to smaller units of oral language (Cormier & Dea 1997). Rhyme instruction and syllable segmenting help develop phonological awareness (Heroman & Joans). Without knowledge of the separate sounds that make up words, it is difficult for children to hear separate sounds, recognize the sound’s position in a word, and understand the role sounds play within the word (Ukrainetz, Cooney, Dyer, Kysar, & Harris, 2000), and ultimately helping children learn to read (Ehri & Nunes, 2002; Fitzpatrick, 1997; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). It could be compared, for example, to how much more successful young chemistry students will be if they first understand the periodic table of elements, the very basic building blocks of the language of chemistry.

A considerable body of research indicates that early literacy instruction including phonemic awareness instruction, among other components such as reading literature aloud and encouraging children to write can make reading accessible at an earlier age to more children (Ehri, Nunes, Willows, Schuster, Yaghoub-Zadeh, & Shanahan, 2001; Snow et al., 1998). With quality instruction, research has shown that children can enter kindergarten being able to segment words into phonemes (Hesketh, 2007; Yeh, 2003).

Print awareness is a child’s ability to recognize print; it also includes concepts about print, book concepts, and conventions of print. According to Justice and Vukelich (2008), careful-
ly planned, direct instruction through environmental print activities and picture-word-letter categorization can be used to foster print awareness in preschool children. It allows opportunities for “meaningful engagements with reading and writing, and social support” in addition to direct instruction in the important skills needed to be successful in these literacy activities (Justice & Vukelich, 2008, p. 39).

As children develop print awareness, they begin to understand the connection between oral and written language (Westwood, 2004). When developing print awareness, children learn that print carries meaning, is organized in a specific way, and that reading and writing have common rules (Heroman & Joans, 2010). Print awareness is important because it represents a group of skills that are necessary for children to become successful readers. Children begin to develop print awareness as early as infancy and continue to develop it further throughout early childhood (Kassow, 2006).

Furthermore, Print awareness is a necessary foundational skill that children must possess in order to become proficient readers. Print awareness is developed through daily adult-child interactions with print in the child’s environment and through shared reading experiences. According to Justice and Ezell (2002), reading to a child and talking about the print is the best way to increase children’s print awareness. Print awareness can be increased with structured adult-child shared readings that include an explicit focus on print using both verbal and nonverbal cues (Piasta, Justice, McGinty, & Kaderavek, 2012). Past research has shown shared reading, with prompts to focus on specific aspects of print, accelerates pre-literacy skills for children who are typically developing and those who are at risk for later reading difficulties (Justice & Ezell, 2002; Piasta et al., 2012).

Print knowledge includes general understandings of how print works (e.g., left-to-right directionality in English; right-to-left in Arabic) and the names and sounds of the alphabet. Knowledge about sound, or phonological awareness, includes the ability to attend to and manipulate sound structures of language, progressing from awareness of larger chunks (e.g., sentences, rhyme, beginning sounds), to blending and segmenting individual units of sound (i.e., phonemic awareness). These early skills work together to lay a foundation for later reading success (NELP, 2008).

Many past researchers indicated that the most effective ways to promote early literacy development among young children is reading aloud to them (Bus, van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; IRA/NAEYC, 1998). Bingham et al. (2016) examined teachers’ implementation of an early literacy intervention, Systematic and Engaging Early Literacy (SEEL), on kindergarten children’s development of early literacy skills. They found that learning outcomes in relation to children in the comparison group on rhyme awareness, rhyme generation, letter knowledge, and letter-sound association. Results also showed that children with limited phonological skills benefited most from the intervention.

According to Puranik, Lonigan, and Kim (2011) phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and concept of print are important components of the preschool children’s word spelling and literacy skills. Ezell and Justice (2000) also, suggested that one salient method for enhancing children’s print awareness is by structuring adult-child shared book-reading interactions to include an explicit print focus.

Justice and Ezell (2002) later evaluated the impact of participation in book-reading sessions with a print focus on print awareness in preschool children from low income households. A book-reading intervention was conducted for 30 children enrolled in Head Start. Children were matched on chronological age and then randomly placed into an experimental or control group. Pretest measures of children’s print awareness were administered. Subsequently, children in both groups participated in 24 small-group reading sessions over an 8-week period. Children in the experimental group participated in shared reading sessions that included a print focus. As an alternate condition, control-group children participated in shared reading sessions with a picture focus. Post-testing indicated that children who participated in print-focused reading sessions outperformed their control group peers on three measures of print awareness and in terms of overall performance.

Kamii and Manning (2002) examined the relationship between children’s development in writing and their development in phonological analysis. Specifically, they investigated kindergartners’ levels of writing as an inde-
dependent variable and their performance on oral-segmentation tasks as the dependent variable. They found a highly significant multiple correlations $R$ and concluded that: (1) children's ability to deal with oral-segmentation tasks seems to depend on their knowledge of the writing system, and (2) the ability to segment words into phonemes is not a cause or prerequisite for learning to read and write.

In conclusion, reviewing the literature showed that some research focused on phonemic awareness (Kamii & Manning, 2002; Noe et al., 2014). Other research focused on print awareness in preschool children (Ezell & Justice, 2000; & Justice & Ezell, 2000). Some research showed that reading to a child and talking about the print is the best way to increase children’s print awareness. Also, print awareness can be increased with structured adult-child shared readings that include an explicit focus on print using both verbal and nonverbal cues (Piasta et al., 2012). Another suggested, “Storytelling and storybook reading provide many kinds of preparation for learning to read and write” (Clay, 2001, p. 116).

However, the limited literature on emergent literacy suggests that little is known about the print awareness and phonemic awareness in the context of the Arabic language and Jordan specifically (Ihmeideh, Al-Basheer, & Al-Momani, 2008). Therefore, the present study focused on investigating the impact of using reading storybooks and writing journal activities on print and phonemic awareness of Jordanian kindergarten children.

**Research Problem**

Current research suggests that many children experiencing problems learning to read during their elementary years may be related to deficiencies in their emergent literacy skills development, skills that are typically acquired during the preschool years (August & Shanahan, 2006). August and Shanahan’s (2006) research found three key emergent literacy skills that could predict children’s reading ability during the elementary school years: (1) oral language proficiency, (2) phonological processing, and (3) print knowledge.

However, the purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of using reading storybooks and writing journal activities on print and phonemic awareness of Jordanian kindergarten children. More specifically, this present study aimed to address the following questions:

1. To what extent does participation in storybook-reading sessions and writing journal activities influence the phonemic awareness skills of kindergarten children?

2. To what extent does participation in storybook-reading sessions and writing journal activities influence the phonemic awareness skills of kindergarten children?

**Importance of the Study**

Based on the discussion above, it is clear that print and phonemic awareness is a necessary foundational skill that children must possess in order to become proficient readers (August & Shanahan, 2006; Edwards, & Taub, 2016; Erhri et al., 2001; Ehri & Nunes, 2002; Fitzpatrick, 1997; Liberman, Shankweiler, & Liberman, 1989; Morrow, 2009; Noe et al., 2014; Puranik et al., 2011; Snow et al., 1998; Torgesen, 1998). According to Liberman et al. (1989), the most common cause of difficulties acquiring early word-reading skills is weakness in the ability to process phonological features. Goswami (2000) mentioned, “Agreement on the importance of phoneme awareness for reading development is universal. It is probably true to say that every study that has measured the relationship between phonemic awareness causes progress in reading has found a positive connection” (p. 255).

According to Ihmeideh et al. (2008), a scarcity of empirical studies exists that tackle the development of early reading and writing for kindergarten children in Jordan. This study is the first of its kind in Jordan and strives to investigate the impact of using reading storybooks and writing journal activities on print and phonemic awareness of Jordanian kindergarten children. This study contributes valuable data and information to the literature on the field of teaching reading and writing at this age. Moreover, it also shows how much a developing country, such as Jordan, needs more support and expert people to help their children to learn reading and writing (USAID, 2012). Finally, it is hoped to pave the way for more research in this particular field.
Context of the Study

Early childhood education in Jordan consists of two grade levels, kindergarten 1 (KG1) and kindergarten 2 (KG2) with one academic year for each level. Usually, children enter KG1 at the age of four. The aim of these two levels is to prepare children for first grade. In regard to the Arabic language, children are expected to recognize and write the 28 Arabic letters by the end of KG2. No emphasis is placed on skills beyond recognition of letters, such as formal reading and writing. The language of instruction in public kindergartens is Arabic, which is the official language in Jordan. Like English, the Arabic letters’ naming system is different from the letters’ sounds, which places many students in a difficult situation in learning letters. This necessitates providing students with extra help.

The Arabic language is an alphabetic language and considered a very difficult language to learn. In part, this is because the word is a connection of different letters together, which is common to many languages, but in Arabic these letters have different shapes when they connect together based on different rules. Some letters have up to four different shapes and nine different sounds when connected with other letters to make a word.

Theoretical Framework

Teaching young children how to read and write has been a long debated issue among educators. Pre-school educators do not agree on how to foster literacy awareness: some are committed to having children learn their letters to give a good preparation for entry to school, while others would leave children unaware of the existence of such things until faced with school instruction (Clay 1998). As educators increasingly are expected to implement evidence-based practice, or scientifically-based instruction (Bingham et al., 2016), in teaching children to read, more studies using various theoretical frameworks and methodologies measuring the effectiveness of various teaching methods are badly needed. When these studies show repeated positive results for learning, curriculum should move toward these types of instruction (Noe et al., 2014).

This study followed the same theoretical framework established by Marie Clay, a researcher from New Zealand (1967). In 1966 Clay defined emergent literacy as early read-
• Hypothesis 2: storybook-reading sessions that include a print focus and writing journal activities will have a significant impact on the phonemic awareness skills of the kindergarten children tested.

Thus, the independent variables for this study were reading storybooks and writing journal activities which utilized in the experimental group, and the conventional way in the control group. While, the dependent variable were the student's print and phonemic awareness.

Method

Study Design

This study used a quasi-experimental research design in which children were randomly assigned either to an experimental or control classroom. Program staff randomly assigned the children upon their enrolment in this public school. The typical protocol at this public school setting was that students were randomly assigned to one of two kindergarten classrooms upon admission into the program. The study was conducted over 14 weeks, with the first and last week devoted to pre and post testing. The intervening 12-week period was used to deliver the experimental language stimulation activities twice weekly.

Participants

Fifty KG2 children (23 boys, and 27 girls; mean age before intervention = 62.19 months; SD = 2.27) were recruited from one school in second Irbid district’s public school of Jordan, which previously agreed to be part of the study. Parents of all 50 children gave permission for their children to take part in the study. All children belonged to the middle socioeconomic class according to the living standards of Jordan. The children were in two sections; one section was randomly assigned to the experimental group (EG) and the other to the control group (CG). The EG had 12 boys and 13 girls, while the CG had 11 boys and 14 girls.

The principal of the kindergarten, as well as their supervisor, judged the teachers in both groups as functionally equivalent. Both teachers have bachelor’s degrees in early childhood education from the same university; the experimental teacher has 7 years of experience and the control teacher has 8 years of experience.

Both teachers had an overall evaluation by the educational district as excellent for the last three years.

Data Collection

This study aimed at enhancing children’s print and phonemic awareness skills. Children in the experimental group participated in 24 small-group reading sessions and in 14 writing journals over a 14-week period to enhance their print and phonemic awareness skills. Children’s parents received a letter describing the goals and methods of the study. They were asked to voluntarily allow their children to participate in this study, and a signed informed consent was also obtained from parents by the researchers after gaining the permission from school, and teachers. To ensure anonymity of participants and confidentiality of data, parents were assured that their children’s responses would be used for research purposes only.

Data were collected through individual interviews with children. Through the interview, children were tested on nine different skills. Print awareness and phonemic awareness assessments were subjected to pilot testing using a 15 children out of the research sample was first made in order to assess the study’s reliability. From the pilot, the test and retest reliability for the print awareness assessment was 0.87 and for the phonemic awareness assessment was 0.82. Also, The Cronbach Alpha method was used to test the reliability for calculating the internal consistency for each assessment. The internal consistency of the print awareness assessment was between 0.87-0.71, and the internal consistency of the phonemic awareness assessment was between 0.92-0.85. This result means that the reliability coefficient was satisfactory for the purpose of this study.

Furthermore, eight experts in the Arabic language and early childhood education judged the tests; they helped to translate and adapt the instruments (pre, and post test) into the Arabic language to maintain their validity. Details for each skill follow below.

Print awareness assessment. Four informal measures for examining children’s early literacy skills were administered during pretest and posttest. The measures were administered in the same order to each child to avoid possible negative order effects that might have oc-
curried if similar tasks were presented consecutively or if more difficult tasks were presented before easier tasks; since the measures were applied individually (2007; Soman, 2014). Table 1 provides an overview of the assessment protocol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print Concepts</td>
<td>Print- and book-reading conventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words in Print</td>
<td>Words as elements of written language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabet Knowledge and</td>
<td>Letter names (expressive and receptive) and distinctive features of letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Terms</td>
<td>Written language terms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Print concepts.** This test represented a modification of Clay’s (1979) Concepts About Print test. Adaptation occurred primarily to make the test more appropriate for the Arabic language. The purpose of the modified test was to determine children’s knowledge of print and book-reading conventions in the Arabic language. Following Clay’s protocol, the examiner read the target book with the child, during which the child was presented a series of tasks (e.g., “Show me the front of the book,” and “Show me the name of this book”). Correct responses typically received 1 point. The total number of possible points was 20.

For Words in Print, Alphabet knowledge and letter discrimination, and Literacy terms assessment protocol (Clay, 1967; 1979; Ihmeideh, 2009; Justice & Ezell, 2002; Morrow, 2004), which was designed and adapted to the Arabic language and to display the selection of the follow print awareness skills.

**Words in print.** This measure examined children’s awareness of printed words as discrete elements of written language. For example, displaying the cover of the book, the examiner said to the child: “How many words are in the name of this book?” Examples of additional tasks included “Show me the first word on this page,” and “Point to the words as I read.” Children received 2 points for correct responses and 0 points for incorrect responses. The total number of points available was 20.

**Alphabet knowledge and letter discrimination.** To determine children’s knowledge of the alphabet, 20 tasks (10 receptive and 10 expressive) were presented using alphabet cards that depicted the letters of the alphabet. For the expressive tasks, children were asked to choose a card from an array, one at a time, and to name each letter as it was chosen. To test receptive knowledge of the alphabet, children were asked to point to each letter as the examiner named it. Furthermore, for all 20 tasks, children were shown the target letter and were asked to point to an item from the array that was the same. One point was given for correct items, for a total of 20 possible points.

**Literacy terms.** This subtest examined children’s understanding of written language units and print terms. A set of 20 cards was developed and used for this purpose. Each card depicted four written language concepts among the targeted written language units including: reading, writing, print, number, letter, letter’s shape, question mark, word, and sentence. Each unit was tested twice using different foils. Incorrect responses were scored as 0, whereas correct responses received one point each. The maximum score was 20.

**Phonemic awareness assessment.** Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear the separate sounds that comprise spoken words. It involves perceiving the relationships between sounds and having the ability to alter and rearrange sounds to create new words. Table 2 provides an overview of the Phonemic assessment protocol (Peter, 2007; The National Reading Panel, 2000; Yopp & Yopp, 2000, Ukrainetz et al., 2000), which was designed and adapted to the Arabic language and to display the selection of phonemic awareness skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>What Is Assessed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Sound Identification</td>
<td>A child’s ability to identify the first letter sounds,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Sound Identification</td>
<td>A child’s ability to identify the first letter sounds,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhyme Supply</td>
<td>A child’s ability to generate a word that rhymes with an auditory prompt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoneme Blending</td>
<td>Awareness of individual phonemes and awareness of ways to create word patterns with phonemes. (Listening to a sequence of separately spoken sounds and combining them to form a recognizable word).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoneme Segmentation</td>
<td>Awareness of individual phonemes and the auditory position of phonemes in a word. Also breaking a word into its sounds by counting the sounds in each word</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedures
In order to have suitable and safe results that were statistically testable, a practical pretest for the achievement of both groups was conducted; means and standard deviations were computed with t-tests as well. The results showed no significant differences (p = .05) between group means for the pre-test, reflecting the sample homogeneity and sufficiency.

The control group was taught in the conventional way followed by the kindergarten. In the conventional way, many teachers in Jordan focus with start showing the letter and then giving three to four words which include the letter that the teacher thought without focus on the letter’s sound in each word. Then the teacher gives the children the time to write the letter, with no opportunities to read and write about the experience; there is no practice on free writing or reading stories. The experimental group, however, was taught through a program that involved children in 24 small-group reading sessions and in 14 writing journal sessions over a 14-week period to enhance their print and phonemic awareness skills. Both groups followed the same curriculum and covered the same content.

The experimental teacher was familiarized with the program through six 1-hour individual training sessions conducted by the author. Each consecutive session was separated by 3 to 5 days. After each session, the teacher reviewed what was learned at home and brought questions to the trainer in the next session. Further, this teacher was observed by the trainer during the implementation of the intervention and given feedback on her performance. In the first month of class, the teacher was observed twice a week. After that, she was observed once a week for 3 months.

In classroom sessions, children in the experimental group received oral language stimulation and exposure to emergent literacy concepts. The goal was to increase the children’s language and literacy proficiency. Storybook-reading that features the targeted letter was presented to the children. In this manner the children were introduced to a letter and its sound within the context of intact, whole language. Reading aloud supports the teaching of a child’s concept of story, development of literary appreciation, the sharpening of awareness of the elements of design, and introducing literary elements. The task of the emergent literacy teacher is to sell children on the joy and pleasure of reading.

Furthermore, on each Thursday of the instruction, classroom teachers led circle time and asked children to draw, write, and show their journals around the circle and respond to teacher questions about the events depicted. On Thursdays, during choice time, the teacher applied Piagetian principles of re-presentation of verbal and nonverbal concepts (Piaget, 1959) in a new context. This was accomplished by working individually with each child to redraw the main components from the original journal entry on a larger piece of plain paper while talking with the child about the events, adding details, and encouraging new vocabulary.

The first phase of interviews was conducted in the first week of the second semester (Spring 2015), while the second phase occurred in the last week of the same semester. The researcher conducted all interviews. The interview took place in a quiet room in the kindergarten. The interviewer started by giving the child a little gift and talking to him or her for about two minutes as an ice breaker. Then, the author started to ask children to perform the tasks. Tasks were presented in the same order for all children. Materials relevant to each task were made available for the child and then replaced by others depending on the type of the task.

Data Analysis
To assess the print and phonemic awareness, children’s raw scores from both pretest and posttest were entered for analysis using SPSS, with significance alpha levels set at p = .05. Specifically, means, standard deviations, and Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were computed. (MANOVA) is considered an appropriate procedure when multiple dependent measures are collected over time (pre-test and post-test), therefore was appropriate for testing significance here (Stevens, 1996). “Group” served as the between-subjects variable, whereas “time” served as the within-subjects variable.

Results
To answer the first research question concerning the extent participation in storybook-reading sessions and writing journal activities influences the print-awareness skills of
kindergarten children, and to test the first hypothesis which stated the storybook-reading sessions that include a print focus and writing journal activities will have a significant impact on the print-awareness skills of the kindergarten children tested, means and standard deviations for the pre and post student-learning scores were used to determine the common aspects. A visual comparison of the two groups’ performance from pre to post test on the print awareness is presented in Table 3.

Visual inspection indicates that the mean scores for children in both groups increased from pre- to posttest across all measures. Data also suggests that the gains made by the experimental group (M= 64.1) were greater than those of the control group (M=54.1) on all measures. Statistical analyses were conducted to determine if gains made by children in the experimental condition were significantly different from those that occurred for children in the control condition. Furthermore, results of the MANOVA showed a significant main effect for group in print awareness F(4, 46) = 9.962, p = .006, in favor of the experimental group; which means that the experimental group demonstrated a greater increase in print awareness performance over time compared to the control group.

To answer the second research question concerning the extent participation in storybook-reading sessions and writing journal activities influences the phonemic-awareness skills of kindergarten children, and to test the first hypothesis which stated storybook-reading sessions that include a print focus and writing journal activities will have a significant impact on the phonemic-awareness skills of the kindergarten children tested. The means and standard deviations for the pre and post student-learning scores were used to determine the common aspects which presented in Table 4.

The data presented in Table 4 shows the mean score of the experimental group was 40.5 with a standard deviation of 13.1 on the phonemic awareness’ pre-test, while the mean score of the post-test on the phonemic awareness’ was 64.0 with a standard deviation of 17.8. Data also suggests that the gains made by the experimental group were greater than those of the control group on all measures as well.

Furthermore, results of the MANOVA showed a significant main effect for group in phonemic awareness F(5, 45) = 5.231, p = .035), in favor of the experimental group; which means that the experimental group demonstrated a greater increase in phonemic awareness performance over time compared to the control group.

### Discussion

Results from this study revealed a significant positive influence from reading storybooks and writing journal activity sessions in the Arabic-language kindergarten students tested. The present results support the findings of Justice and Ezell (2000), in which children who participated in shared home reading sessions with a print focus demonstrated greater gains in pre-literacy skills compared to children in a control group. The present study extends these researchers’ earlier work by investigating both reading storybooks and writing journal activities and its impact on print and phonemic awareness of Arabic-language Jordanian kindergarten children within a public school setting.

Analysis of pretest-posttest scores for print and phonemic awareness showed that children in both groups demonstrated significant gains in print and phonemic awareness from

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print Awareness Composite</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>50.163</td>
<td>64.100</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9.962</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print Awareness Composite</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>15.623</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Measure</th>
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<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic Awareness Composite</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.231</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic Awareness Composite</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>6.152</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data presented in Table 4 shows the mean score of the experimental group was 40.5 with a standard deviation of 13.1 on the phonemic awareness’ pre-test, while the mean score of the post-test on the phonemic awareness’ was 64.0 with a standard deviation of 17.8. Data also suggests that the gains made by the experimental group were greater than those of the control group on all measures as well.

Furthermore, results of the MANOVA showed a significant main effect for group in phonemic awareness F(5, 45) = 5.231, p = .035), in favor of the experimental group; which means that the experimental group demonstrated a greater increase in phonemic awareness performance over time compared to the control group. The present results support the findings of Justice and Ezell (2000), in which children who participated in shared home reading sessions with a print focus demonstrated greater gains in pre-literacy skills compared to children in a control group. The present study extends these researchers’ earlier work by investigating both reading storybooks and writing journal activities and its impact on print and phonemic awareness of Arabic-language Jordanian kindergarten children within a public school setting.
pre to post test. However, the children in the experimental group made significantly greater gains than those in the control group. This result is supported by previous studies (Bus et al., 1995; Clay, 2001; Edwards & Taub, 2016; Ezell & Justice, 2000; Justice & Ezell, 2000; Noe et al., 2014). The next question that arises here is why did the book reading and journal writing affect children’s print awareness and phonemic awareness so strongly? One possibility is that children from the ages of 3 to 5 rapidly develop print awareness when adults engage in activities to build their early literacy skills (Bingham et al., 2016; Ihmeideh, 2013). Without print awareness, children will not develop letter sound correspondence, word reading skills, or the ability to read and understand text (Ihmeideh, 2013). It is also having daily writing activities in which they can develop general concepts about writing and learn to attend to finer features of writing (Morrow & McGee, 2005; NELP, 2008), and share their writing (Walmsley & Walmsley, 1996).

Another possibility is that children in the experimental group were prompted by the adult reader to attend to words as elements of written language. Children in the control group, by contrast, did not receive this type of explicit guidance (Puranik et al., 2011).

Additionally, these children’s ability to deal with oral-segmentation tasks seemed to depend on their knowledge of the writing system, which was developed through writing journal sessions. These specific findings support the previous research of Edwards and Taub (2016) and Kamii and Manning (2002). Edwards and Taub (2016) found statistically significant relationships between blending and segmenting skills and blending and reading comprehension. Furthermore, according to Ukrainetz (2000), “Children can learn phonemic awareness in a naturalistic approach consistent with the principles of emergent literacy instruction. Sounds in words can be discussed within conversations embedded in storybook reading and story writing” (p. 531). However, Kilpatrick (2012) considered phoneme segmentation skills as the sole measure of phonemic awareness on reading instruments.

In summary, the present research found that participation in reading sessions and writing journals enhanced children’s performance in several specific areas of print and phonemic awareness and in terms of overall performance.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this research was to examine the impact of using reading storybooks and writing journal activities on print and phonemic awareness of Jordanian kindergarten children. This study found a positive impact of reading storybooks and writing journal activities on print and phonemic awareness of Arabic-language Jordanian kindergarten children. This gives evidence to the importance of reading storybooks to kindergarten-aged children and having them do writing journal activities to increase emergent literacy. It also furthers the evidence-based support for using these types of activities in the classroom. Thus, in order for reading and writing to continue emerging and developing in kindergarten children, they need to be deeply involved in a print-rich environment and need to have ample opportunities to explore language as language-users in the same way they learn to speak (Ihmeideh, 2013; Justice, 2007; Miller, 2000). Many interesting implications arise from these findings as well. First, every early childhood classroom and home-study setting within home schooling environments should have a reading and writing area where books and writing materials are plentiful. In the early childhood classroom, this area should be friendly and relaxing, affording young readers the opportunity for individual and small group socializing. Moreover, in language-rich environments, the child’s decoding phonic skills grow fast and they should be encouraged to sound out words and try their skills at writing.

This study only focused on Jordanian kindergarteners in one public school setting, future studies could examine differences between public compared to private schools, or between different language learners at the same age, or even compare if there are regional differences among Arabic-speaking countries compared to Jordan. Also further studies could investigate the effect of play and specific activities on print and phonological awareness. All of these variations would help to further generalize the benefits of these activities for this age population.
Finally, children come to preschool with different knowledge bases about language and literacy. Teachers can further this awareness with high-quality literacy experiences that are developmentally appropriate, “Differentiated instruction is a pedagogical approach to teaching that acknowledges and responds to student differences in readiness, interests, and learner profiles” (Justice & Vukelich, 2008, p. 224). These activities are ideal for teaching early literacy skills to preschoolers because it allows the teacher to meet the children at their needs, all while allowing children to work at their own comfort level (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

References


Evaluating the Dispositions of Teacher Education Candidates: A Place for Self-Assessment

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Abstract: The study explored how New Mexico State University (NMSU) teacher candidates understand the assessment form, the assessment process, and the meaning of dispositions assessment according to NCATE standards as related to their development of professional dispositions. The study utilized a qualitative methodology. We used the focus group method with four groups: elementary (N=3), secondary (N=10), early childhood (N=6), and special education candidates (N=4). We asked teacher candidates about their understanding of dispositions and the dispositions assessment process at the beginning of their program and at the end of their program. Based on the analysis, we found that self-assessment of dispositions at this institution is well-grounded conceptually, and the teacher education candidates found the process to be meaningful to them, but that teacher education candidates’ perspectives suggest it has been flawed in execution. We conclude with recommendations both for the teacher education program we have studied and for teacher education accreditation agencies.

Keywords: Dispositions assessment, teacher education program, accreditation.

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The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) have consolidated into the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). CAEP’s commission adopted NCATE’s inclusion of dispositions as requisite for effective teachers. Dispositions are the “professional attitudes, values, and beliefs” that “support student learning and development” (NCATE, 2008, pp. 89-90). In 2002, NCATE accreditation standards required teacher education programs (TEPs) to both “articulate” and “systematically assess” candidate dispositions (p. 19). CAEP calls for an adequate, reliable, and valid instrument to assess dispositions. While this requirement is pushing many institutions to focus on dispositions assessment, the critical issue to consider in this phase is that although assessment is important, the development of dispositions should be of most concern in teacher education to ensure the preparation of effective teachers (Carroll, 2005; Diez, 2006).

**Background to New Mexico State University’s Teacher Preparation Program**

New Mexico State University (NMSU), in the southwestern United States, is a Hispanic-Serving and Minority-Serving Institution. Although 23 tribal nations are within the state’s boundaries, the two largest ethnic groups at NMSU are Hispanic (49%) and White (33%) students (NMSU Fact Book, 2013). “Tribal nations” refers to the hundreds of distinct communities of tribal peoples who are indigenous to what is now the United States. Although Europeans, through invasion and colonialism, attempted to extinguish these peoples, they continue to govern themselves and practice their spiritual, linguistic, cultural, and knowledge traditions. Hispanic students come from families who have been in the state and region for hundreds of years, and from families who are recent arrivals to the United States; many students are Spanish speaking. NMSU serves students both from urban areas of the state and from rural or farming and ranching communities. The institution also hosts a significant population of international students. Numerous students receive some form of need-based financial aid (NMSU Fact Book, 2013).

The Teacher Education Program (TEP) includes the College of Education (CoEd) and the College of Arts and Sciences, with the CoEd’s Department of Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) having the most responsibility for dispositions development and assessment. C&I’s mission statement reads in part:

> We envision and enact dispositions, competencies, and pedagogies that will build and sustain social justice communities within geopolitical, socio-cultural, and historical contexts. These contexts inform how knowledge is shaped and represented, transforming classrooms, schools, and communities. (Department of Curriculum and Instruction, 2012).

Through its mission statement one comes to understand that C&I is anchored in multicultural education and a social justice perspective of curriculum and pedagogy. This anchoring positions the department to prepare teachers who practice transformative education for the benefit of their students and the students’ communities. To do so, teacher candidates are expected to take risks, challenge the status quo and learn “about themselves, their social roles, and the necessity of that process for their socio-cultural and socio-political transformations” as they come to understand the intersections of race, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, language, gender orientation, sexuality, diverse abilities, and many other hidden or seemingly invisible manifestations.

The theoretical and philosophical stance of the department is based in critical multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and social justice; tied specifically to the work of Paula Freire (1970). Although a wealth of scholarship has been developed by scholars of multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 2001; Baptiste & Boyer, 1996; Bennett, 2001; May 1999; Sleeter& Grant, 1987), a definitive definition does not exist. For purposes of this article, we rely on Nieto and Bode’s 2008, p. 44) definition:

> Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. Multicultural education permeates schools’ curriculum and instructional strategies as well as the interactions among teachers, students, and families and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy
as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education promotes democratic principles of social justice.

To operationalize their mission statement, the C&I faculty moved to develop in their teacher candidates' professional dispositions so they would develop as effective and culturally responsive pre-service teacher candidates and in-service teachers. The faculty identified five characteristics (caring, equitable, professional, responsible, and socially just) and developed the dispositions form to assess them through a deliberate and time-intensive process.

To emphasize growth in each of these dispositions and each specific indicator of the dispositions, in the assessment process, candidates were to identify themselves and be identified by their course instructors as falling into the categories of awareness, developing, or praxis (insert link to the dispositions-assessment form). The category of awareness indicated that students possessed and were able to demonstrate a new consciousness, perspective or concept. The category of developing indicated that students were processing and analyzing meaning, sense or connection. Praxis was defined as “reflective application.” Praxis was considered the highest level of demonstration. Freire (1988) described praxis as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 36).

NCATE has required dispositions assessment though its standards of “Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Dispositions” and “Assessment System and Unit Evaluation” (2008a, pp. 12-13). NCATE maintained that caring and qualified teachers could help students learn basic skills along with the skills and knowledge of how to become responsible citizens.

Upon the consolidation of NCATE and TEAC into CAEP, the CAEP Commission on Standards and Performance Reporting (CAEP Commission, 2013) specifies that teacher preparation programs must monitor attributes and dispositions beyond academic ability that candidates must demonstrate at admissions and during the program. The provider selects criteria, describes the measures used and evidence of their reliability and validity of those measures, and reports data that show how the academic and non-academic factors predict candidate performance in the program and effective teaching (p. 9).

Review of Literature

Dispositions Assessment

A review of the dispositions literature reveals the consideration and assessment of dispositions to be more complex and controversial than NCATE and CAEP standards would suggest. Pessimistically, Haberman (1991) maintained that certain forms of multiculturalism could not even be taught in TEPs as they existed at the time. He asserted that the best that institutions could do without substantial change was to select candidates who had what he called “cultural awareness” (p. 25) before they entered TEPs. Haberman and Garmon (2005) emphasized that the attitudes candidates brought with them to TEPs had substantial influence on what dispositions they would develop in those programs; they in effect, questioned the influence that TEPs have on dispositions development.

But other scholars have emphasized that TEPs must do what they can to develop dispositions in teacher candidates (Carroll, 2005, 2012; Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Duplass and Cruz (2010) cite a number of scholars who claim that “with the right set of conditions, people can be motivated to change their disposition and their behavior” (p. 141). Buchman (1993) saw candidates as having to shift their orientation from the person to the role: “a shift of concern from self to others comes more from acknowledging, ‘This is the kind of work I am doing,’ than from stating ‘This is how I feel’ or ‘This is how I do things’” (p. 148). In fact, Haberman’s (1991) pessimistic argument was not so much that dispositions should or could not be developed, but rather developing them was impractical, given current conditions and resources in units of teacher preparation. Diez (2006) maintained, “Assessment can play a major role” (p. 65) in dispositions development.

Given the lack of resources in units of teacher preparation, Duplass and Cruz (2010) listed a number of issues that complicate the process of assessing dispositions. Four of the most salient for our purposes are: (a) the difficulty of assessing dispositions thoroughly and accurately, given faculty’s limited contact with
students and the range of other responsibilities assigned to professors; (b) the fact that dispositions develop over long periods of time and that they may be demonstrated only when the right opportunities arise; (c) controversy about which kinds of data to use to assess dispositions: quantitative or qualitative; and (d) the potential for legal liabilities that could arise when a candidate is removed from the program because s/he lacks the “right” dispositions. The CAEP Commission, (2013) states forthrightly, “Research has not empirically established a particular set of non-academic qualities that teachers should possess” (p. 11). The last item, though perhaps not the most important in Duplass and Cruz’s (2010) list, is pertinent given our mention above of CAEP’s current requirement to use assessments of known and adequate reliability and validity. Documenting reliability and validity is accomplished more readily with quantitative data. Diez (2006) questioned—as do we—the assumptions behind and implications of dispositions assessment processes that over-emphasize presumed objectivity, the breaking of dispositions into discrete components, and standardization of expectations of observable behaviors.

Despite legitimate concerns that might be raised about CAEP’s emphases in the process of dispositions assessment, CAEP does seem in sync with NMSU faculty’s consideration of and response to diversity. The CAEP Commission on Standards and Performance Reporting endorses the Standards of the Interstate Teacher and Support Consortium (INTASC) which “contain literally scores of references to cultural competence, individual differences, creativity and innovation and working with families and communities” (CAEP Commission, 2013, p. 21). Our study builds on the literature we refer to here to deepen understanding of how assessment of dispositions can be a contributor to dispositions development, particularly with regard to diversity and multiculturalism that has shaped the vision and mission of the department on Curriculum and Instruction on this study.

**Assessment of Dispositions as related to Professional Development**

Our review of the literature revealed two factors to which teacher educators need to attend if dispositions assessment is to support dispositions development. The first factor to consider is self-reflection. According to Diez (2006), dispositions assessment needs to be part of an ongoing reflective process to support dispositional development through reflection, feedback, and providing documentation of performance. Wilson, Thornburg, and Riley (2005) stated that, “Teacher educators should first assist candidates in becoming conscious of their dispositions, find out what they want to change, and then create circumstances in which they can begin this development transformation” (p. 1). In addition to classroom support, Koerner (1992) stressed that teacher educators need to support the development of dispositions through student teaching because student teaching is an evolution from preparing to be teachers to professional practice and reflection on teaching. Breese and Nawarocki-Chabin (2007) agreed with Koerner, but added “our role as teacher educators is to structure opportunities for candidates to examine the relationships among teacher behaviors, their impact on teaching and learning, and the dispositions such behavior signals to students, colleagues, administrators, and parents” (p. 34).

The second factor to consider in supporting dispositions development is that dispositions assessment should be public and explicit (Diez, 2006). Diez proposed that both teacher candidates and teacher educators need to be aware of the exact goal of the assessment in order for teacher candidates to visualize and achieve expected performance, behaviors, and attitudes. Diez also recommended that teacher educators have explicit and clear criteria to evaluate teacher candidate dispositions in order to support the candidates’ awareness, reflection, and development of their dispositions.

Therefore, we note that teacher candidates’ self-assessment of their own dispositions might foster self-reflection, which can support dispositions development. We emphasize that in order for self-reflection to occur, teacher candidates need the opportunity to utilize and continuously reflect on each disposition within a dialogical process with professors/instructors and student colleagues in the classroom context. The opportunity for dialog fosters moving into *praxis* by creating connections between course content (knowledge) and one’s practice or potential practice. As such, research on candidate self-assessment should examine the extent to which it is meaningful to
Role of Assessment in Dispositions Development: The Case of New Mexico State University

According to the literature, the mere assessment of teacher candidate dispositions is not a sufficient condition for dispositions development. We contend, however, that assessment could be carried out in such a way as to foster introspection and reflection, consequently contributing to dispositions development. To provide evidence for our claim, we move now to our study.

In alignment with NCATE/CAEP’s requirement that TEPs assess dispositions, and despite NCATE’s urging that dispositions be based on observation of candidates in their clinical experiences, NMSU developed a system based on teacher candidates’ self-assessment of their own dispositions. To facilitate the process NMSU teacher candidates self-assessed their dispositions at several points during their progress through the TEP. However, up to this point, NMSU faculty had lacked knowledge of candidates’ reactions to this assessment. As such, the faculty cannot tell in any systematic way how meaningful teacher candidates find the dispositions assessment currently in place, and therefore, cannot tell to what extent the dispositions assessment process contributes to introspection and self-reflection. As researchers, we explored in this study how teacher candidates understand the assessment form, the assessment process, and the meaning of dispositions assessment as related to their development of professional dispositions.

Method

Qualitative Design

Our study explored teacher candidates understanding of the dispositions and the dispositions assessment process according to NCATE as related to their development of professional dispositions on the department of Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) at New Mexico State University (NMSU). We used qualitative research to elicit teacher candidate’s understanding of the dispositions assessment process, specifically focus group interviews. Qualitative research is based on the premise that “knowledge is obtained by participating sub-

jectively in a world of meaning created by individuals. What exists is what people perceive to exist” (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006, p. 14). Hence, we assume that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in an interaction with their world where realities are not fixed, singular, or measurable phenomena (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Our research explored how teacher candidates understand the assessment form, the assessment process, and the meaning of dispositions assessment as related to their development of professional dispositions.

To acknowledge our “researcher as instrument” (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006) positionality within the qualitative paradigm and to represent the multiple realities present within this study, we must identify ourselves. Two of us, referred in this article as “author/researchers”, interacted with the teacher candidates through the focus-group interviews while the third author was central to the development of the dispositions assessment form and process, and used the assessment in a course. The third author did not moderate the focus group interviews, nor have any contact with the teacher candidate participants.

Focus-Group Interviews

The focus group interview provides a comfortable environment for a group of participants who possess specifically identified characteristics. Participants share their perceptions on a topic or phenomenon with the researcher or researchers in focused discussion. The data gained from this method may offer an accurate reflection of group members’ views because the researchers, serving as moderators, do not mediate power. The researchers facilitate a discussion or conversation between the participants, and strive to avoid showing approval or disapproval of what they say; there is no compulsion to tell a story to please the moderator since all types of comments are welcomed into the discussion. Participants are encouraged to speak honestly and openly (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Data collection

Since, consistent with the expectations of the developers of the assessment instrument, we suspected that candidates’ understandings developed over time, we decide to interview NMSU teacher candidates at the entry level.
and exit level. Entry level refers to candidates who had completed the dispositions assessment form for the first time or second time but had not yet been admitted into the TEP. The exit-level group consisted of teacher candidates who were completing their student teaching semester and completing the form for the last time. The focus group participants, for both levels, were recruited in person by one of the author/researchers visiting multiple university classes and sharing with the teacher candidates the purpose of the study and asking if they were willing to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary. We did four focus-group interviews: Entry level, elementary (N=3), Entry level, special education (N=4), Exit level, secondary (N=10), and Exit level, early childhood (N=6). Each focus group was tape recorded and transcribed.

This study is limited to a state university in the south west of the United States that serve minority students. Also the limitation resides within the fact that department of Curriculum and Instruction have developed its dispositions from according to the multicultural education tenants but in compliance with NCATE standards.

Moderating the focus groups

In conducting the focus group interviews the authors/researchers, as moderators, welcomed the participants and presented to them the purpose of the study and the ground rules of the focus group. Participants were also provided with a copy of the NMSU Dispositions Self-Assessment Form. The teacher candidates had recently completed the form, but providing the form during the focus group allowed them to refer to the form throughout the discussion. Based on Krueger and Casey’s (2000) model of analyzing focus group which considered the followings: words, context, internal consistency, specificity of response, finding big data, and the purpose of the study. In addition, we utilized in coding Kruger and Casey’s data analysis method that included: 1) frequency, 2) specificity, and 3) extensiveness. Frequency refers to how frequently something important and related to the purpose of the study is said in the data. Even though we were paying attention to frequency of concepts or words related to the purpose of the study, we were also aware that frequency of utterances should not be our sole criteria—sometimes key insights might have been said only once. Specificity refers to the way we considered the comments that provided details, based on experiences, and were very specific to the purpose of the study. Extensiveness refers to how many different people say the same thing. After discussing our individual coding, we used the coded responses as an organizing frame to classify responses into themes. In the section

- What part of the dispositions assessment seemed disappointing to you? And what made it disappointing?
- Suppose that you were in charge of the TPP program, and were responsible for making sure that TPP candidates have positive dispositions. How would you do it? (For entry-level only)
- Do you feel that your disposition has changed since you started the program? And how? (For exit-level only)
- Our teacher education program is required to assess all of you in knowledge, skills, and dispositions. We want you to help us understand if we are doing a good job of assessing dispositions; and if there is anything that we missed. Is there anything that you wanted to say and didn’t get a chance to say?

Data Analysis

We used an inductive approach based on content analysis (Patton, 1990) as our method of data analysis. This process included each of the two authors conducting the analysis independently and then meeting together to reach consistencies on themes. The process reading and analyzing the data was built on Krueger and Casey’s (2000) model of analyzing focus group which considered the followings: words, context, internal consistency, specificity of response, finding big data, and the purpose of the study. In addition, we utilized in coding Kruger and Casey’s data analysis method that included: 1) frequency, 2) specificity, and 3) extensiveness. Frequency refers to how frequently something important and related to the purpose of the study is said in the data. Even though we were paying attention to frequency of concepts or words related to the purpose of the study, we were also aware that frequency of utterances should not be our sole criteria—sometimes key insights might have been said only once. Specificity refers to the way we considered the comments that provided details, based on experiences, and were very specific to the purpose of the study. Extensiveness refers to how many different people say the same thing. After discussing our individual coding, we used the coded responses as an organizing frame to classify responses into themes. In the section
below, we give a description of each theme, present sub-themes, and provide choice quotes that highlight the themes. All student names are pseudonyms. The level entry or exit and the major are indicated at the end of each quotation.

Results
The findings from the entry and exit level teacher candidate focus groups can be summarized under five major themes:

- The self-assessment process was meaningful.
- Teacher candidates had difficulty understanding the assessment forms.
- Teacher candidates had difficulty understanding the assessment process.
- The dispositions assessment was particularly difficult in online courses.
- Teacher candidates had recommendations for improving dispositions assessment.

The Self-Assessment Process was Meaningful
Some teacher candidates found the self-assessment process to be meaningful in two ways:

The self-assessment process increased awareness of exhibiting positive dispositions.

Specifically, teacher candidates remarked how filling out the forms multiple times raised their awareness and consciousness of exhibiting positive dispositions.

Filling out the dispositions form is making me look toward the future. Because now even on some of the dispositions assessments I put developing as a student teacher, I focus on that one and I thought, “What can I do to . . . to make a change? To change the future? How can I make sure that I’m always at praxis and I do not go back to developing or awareness?” Because I remember the first time I filled this out, like I said before, I was a little bit panicky because I thought, “Oh, my gosh, I’m not going to be a teacher.” So how can I stay at praxis and make sure that I am aware of celebrating diversity in my classroom? That I am aware of the community. (Exit level, secondary)

Polly explained:

I think I agree with what [have] been said [about filling the dispositions form] that you’re really doing a self-reflection. And that ideally you want— everything that’s cited on the chart, you want to be that. You want to make sure that you have the convictions to state facts— see some evidence, even though or if the consequences are unpleasant. I think it’s— you should reflect back to those moral standards: Are you a good person? Are you
following through the way you should be? (Entry level, SPED)

**Teacher candidates had difficulty understanding the assessment form**

Teacher candidates shared that in terms of using and filling out the assessment form they were confused and had a hard time understanding the followings aspects of the form:

Some had difficulty understanding the meaning of the term “dispositions” in the assessment form early in the program. Most of the participants expressed that despite the fact that they found the dispositions self-assessment form to be meaningful to them as a future teachers, they explained that early in the program they had not understood the meaning of the term “dispositions. Gloria recalled initially feeling “It was very, very bizarre. Very hard to get a grasp of what they’re needing me to fit into [this form].” (Exit level, secondary)

Some teacher candidates had difficulty understanding the rating language on the self-assessment form. Candidates explained that they were confused regarding the rating language where they were supposed to indicate whether they were at awareness, developing, or praxis. Gloria admitted:

We do [the form] four times. And I think three of the times, I’ve gotten *praxis* and *awareness* confused. And so I’ve had to go through and redo it because I know that as an education person I should know these words. But then I read the definitions, and I’m like, “Oh, *praxis* is the good one. Wait. Is *awareness* the good one? Because I’m aware of it and I practice it. No. . . *praxis* is the good one. (Exit level, secondary)

**Teacher candidates had difficulty understanding the assessment process**

Teacher candidates expressed that completing the dispositions form was meaningful to their dispositions development, yet they expressed difficulty in understanding the assessment process and the meaning behind filling out the dispositions form. Here, we have two sub-themes:

Some teacher candidates explained they did not know the meaning or the significance of the assessment process. Patricia said,

I was never explained the significance of the dispositions. I was kind of just given it [the assessment form]. You had to do this. There is no explanation; just do it. So if I was given an explanation and the background on the dispositions… it’s helpful. I kind of figured it out on my own. I think it would have been more helpful in the beginning to know [the meaning of the assessment process].(Exit level, early childhood)

Gloria noted:

If you’re never told that ahead of time or at the initial time that it’s been brought out, you’re like, “What is this for? This is not meaningful to me.’ In my first two that I did, I had absolutely no idea.(Exit level, secondary)

**Teacher candidates shared the difficulty** they had in deciding which voice to use while filling out the dispositions form early in the program. They were unsure if they were to use the teacher candidate voice or the future teacher-educator voice. For example, Isabel admitted,

I was confused sometimes of the voice as well, too. Like, should I be [completing the assessment form] as a student or as a teacher/educator? Should I be applying it to this specific class that I’m filling this out for [now], or should it be for the overall big picture?

Demi added,

I think what was confusing about the idea of it being a teacher-candidate disposition is where we answer the questions, like as a student or as a potential teacher. Are we answering it as: Do you go to class? As in, “Do you show up for your… education classes sometime?” Or, is it just education [in general]?Or, is it what you do when you’re doing your practicum and that kind of thing? So it’s kind of like, what voice to use I guess. (Exit level, secondary)

The dispositions assessment was particularly difficult in online courses

The teacher education program at NMSU is not offered online due to the department’s belief in the importance of students’ face-to-face engagement with each other and with faculty. However, a few required courses that are pre-requisites for TEP admission are offered through the online format. One such course had been selected for dispositions assessment. From the interviews it was clear that the online courses were a domain that the participants thought were not appropriate for as-
sessing dispositions. Hilda described her disappointment:

I had to have a disposition done and reviewed by [an online instructor], where I hadn’t had a conversation with her. Just very little communication, but yet she’s judging me on whether or not she feels that I have all these qualities. And I think that is a huge wrong—huge wrong. . . . I think with these types of values you have to really get to know a person before you can make comments. (Entry level, elementary)

Christine remarked on the absence of dialogue regarding the meaning or purpose of the assessment, “It’s . . . even worse on an online course because it is not even an ‘Oh let’s do this during the class, let everybody kind of talk about it’” (Exit level, secondary).

Teacher candidates provided recommendations for improving dispositions assessment.

Teacher candidates suggested that the TEP can improve dispositions assessment through the following means:

1. Make sure course instructors understand the process of assessing dispositions. Some candidates expressed that it would be of great benefit to them if the instructors explained how to complete the dispositions forms by explaining the rating language, how they should rate themselves, and how the rating will be assessed. Jane advised, “The first time they get the dispositions assessment from, whoever is going to hand this out to them, make sure that they—that the professor or whoever is giving them this document—make sure they tell the student, ‘You know what? It’s okay to be at awareness and developing. . . . so you can get to praxis. (Exit level, secondary). She continued, “Because we look at developing and awareness, and I kind of freak out a little bit, I’m not there yet. But, oh, ‘my gosh!’ Am I going to get in a lot of trouble because I’m not doing it?”

Polly said, I think what makes it difficult is that first during the class, your teacher asks you to send them your dispositions [form] so they can go over it. I think what is discouraging is when you think you are at a level like praxis and they are like, “You are not at praxis. You need to change it. You need to re-word your stuff.” So what you think you are at, your teacher might not be [in agreement].

Mari advised also,

I think whenever they give us [the forms] . . . the first person who gives it out, they should have like a whole meeting focusing on that [if it’s supposed to be about self-reflection or not]. I think that’s what [should] happens. They don’t realize, and they think that we already know. And it’s just kind of like . . . Keep on giving them their work (Entry level. SPED)

Dana recommended:

[there is ] no real instruction given by the professor that I was filling it out for, and just, Here you are. And I felt it was completely unchartered territory, and I had no idea what I was doing. And I had no idea at the time. Well, there’s no right or wrong. This is my own self-critique and the assistance from my instructor. So, I wish there would have been a little bit more layering to go along with this as far as what it’s for—you know, the purpose, and how to do it. And maybe . . . just a little more instruction. (Entry level, elementary)

2. Ensure that the classroom instructors or professor provides follow up. Some of the candidates expressed the need for follow up or feedback in timely manner in order to help candidates track their progression or rethink some of the strategies to improve their reflection. Christine pointed out:

The thing that I really didn’t like about [the assessment forms] was that they came up occasionally throughout my educational career. But I have no idea what I put on the last one or the one before that or the one before that so I can’t track my own progression through these [forms]. They were taken from me and I never saw them again and I don’t know what was on them. So I could have praxis on my first one and awareness on the third one. (Exit level, secondary)

I never got feedback for any of my stuff. I would just turn it in. So it got to the point sometimes, too, it was like I’d run into a classmate, ‘Oh, yeah, we have a disposition due.’ And, you know, I’d just look it up look at my old one. I never get any feedback. ‘Oh, [name], you’re—you have like, you know, ‘awareness,’ but you should be ‘developing’
right now. And, you know, I— I’m lost on that.

When I had to do dispositions, my teacher did not give it back to me until two months later, afterwards when the class was already over. And she had marked off basically where I thought I was at. She had marked me down below [to the lower category]. And I did not have an opportunity to talk with him, like, why did you think that? So it’s hard if the teachers do not give it back in a certain amount of time. Because you can set yourself up to be at this level, but if you really do not know or aren’t given an example of what it should look like or how it should be, then that is discouraging.

3. Provide classroom dialogue to discuss dispositions development. Some of the teacher candidates explained that it would be beneficial for growth and self-reflection to engage students in a classroom discussion or dialogue to facilitate reflection on their dispositions. Dennis asserted, “I think the conversation helps to see other people’s viewpoint. And make an understanding of it on your own. And kind of reach . . . a point in your own thoughts so that you know where you fall.” (Exit level, secondary)

Jane claimed: I strongly believe that if we were to go over them as a group and say them out loud, it will make us think a lot more about them. And once we are student teachers, then we have to fill these [forms] at the end, it will help us a lot more to see how much you have improved or if you have improved a lot.

Discussion

Reviewing the literature on dispositions assessment, we did not find direct linkage between dispositions assessment and dispositions development. We found literature, however, that suggested self-reflection was linked to dispositions development. We questioned if dispositions assessment might be linked to dispositions development indirectly, i.e., through fostering self-reflection. Therefore, we have conducted four focus groups to explore how teacher candidates understand the assessment form, the assessment process, and the meaning of dispositions assessment and to what extent it fostered reflection. Our findings support the notion that teacher candidates found dispositions assessment a meaningful contribution to introspection and reflection.

It is clear that some candidates found meaning in the process of assessing their own dispositions various times during their program. This is a necessary condition to lead to self-reflection and dispositions development. So, in that respect, we believe that the NMSU TEP is on the right track in using self-assessment to foster dispositions development.

It is equally clear from our data that some candidates encountered difficulties in the process of assessing their own dispositions. The difficulties of not knowing the meaning of “dispositions” early in the program, not knowing which voice to use, and not understanding the language of the self-assessment form lead candidates to not reflect fully on their dispositions, which may have adversely affected the impact of dispositions assessment on dispositional growth or discouraged them in their dispositional development. In the context of the dispositions assessment at NMSU, it would be beneficial that the assessment of dispositions is public and explicit given Diez’s (2006) recommendation that assessment of dispositions be clear for both teacher educator and TEP candidates. We propose that faculty attention to clarifying the assessment form’s criteria would broaden candidates’ understanding of expected behaviors and attitudes, making the self-assessment more meaningful, thus strengthening its link to dispositional development.

Additionally, teacher candidates remarked that having a public discussion or a dialogue about dispositions assessment in the classroom could offer opportunities for growth and self-reflection. Dennis’s quote above about making “an understanding of it on your own” indicates that offering a space for dialogue about dispositions assessment offers opportunities for self-reflection and growth. Even though the literature reveals little evidence that discussion or dialogue about dispositions supports dispositions growth, we suggest that teacher educators utilize classroom discussion about dispositions assessment as one approach to enhance self-reflection on dispositions leading to dispositions development. Dialogue assists in forming a synergistic relationship between knowledge, reflection, and action, helping candidates recognize the power they have to transform the world. Con-
sistent with the views of Freire and Macedo (1987), we urge that in order to fully develop professional dispositions, teacher candidates need to be provided opportunity to speak the dispositional word in an active, engaging dialogue with others. In this instance the significant others are teacher candidate colleagues and course instructors. Accordingly, in regard to the candidates’ experiences, the faculty of NMSU must take heed to create space in courses to engage candidates in discussions on the developing dispositions. Doing so will allow candidates to further their teacher dispositions development and ensure the enactment of the departmental mission statement in relation to its foundations of multicultural education and social justice.

It seems clear that the self-assessment is sound in its concept but flawed in its execution. To effectively link dispositions self-assessment to development, TEP candidates must have fuller understanding of the process and its purpose. This requires faculty themselves to have fuller understandings so as to explain the process to candidates and to exploit its potential for self-reflection. Focus group participants told us of faculty who demonstrated little or no such understanding.

We propose that the TEP investigate further to find if certain faculty members (e.g., regular fulltime, adjuncts, and teaching assistants) are not helping students with this process. Then, these instructors must be given instruction in the purpose of the assessment and their role in making it effective. As students suggested, faculty should include in their roles the promotion of dialogue about dispositions, to enhance their development. Since faculty turnover occurs frequently, this instruction must become a regular part of the TEP’s responsibilities. Such a sustained faculty development effort will require sustained commitment of time and money. To be meaningful and also to meet accreditation requirements, TEP faculty and staff must come to see dispositions assessment as a main job of teacher preparation, not simply an accreditation requirement with which they must comply.

We do not believe self-assessment of dispositions will fulfill CAEP Commission (2013) requirements that teacher educators provide evidence of the “reliability and validity” (p. 9) of the assessments. Since TEP faculty have invested considerable thought and effort in this self-assessment process, and since it appears to show promise in promoting self-reflection, it would seem self-defeating (and excessively compliant) to abandon it. But CAEP requirements seem to make it necessary to implement in addition an assessment that would meet those requirements for documented reliability and validity. Possibly the TEP’s self-assessment forms and process could serve a formative role and the new CAEP program/TEP needs to adopt, for which one can more easily document reliability and validity, could serve as a summative evaluation of candidates’ dispositions. It could be administered toward the end of the program, possibly during student teaching.

This leads us to question how narrowly NCATE had prescribed that dispositions assessment be based on “observable behaviors in educational settings” (2008a) and how intensely NCATE and CAEP have emphasized reliability and validity in dispositional measurement. In this sense, we fear that NCATE was and CAEP is expecting teacher educators to assess teacher candidates’ dispositions so as to enhance educator quality at the expense of considering the value of dispositions assessment for disposition development. In other words, NCATE and CAEP have emphasized the role of the TEP in certifying the quality of its candidates. This strikes us as a most worthy goal, but efforts to reach it should not be designed so as to crowd out efforts to develop quality. For purposes of dispositions development, real benefit may exist in having candidates assess their own dispositions. Since there is little evidence in the literature that NCATE’s , and now CAEP’s, approach to the task leads to dispositions development, and given the problems with it cited by Garmon (2005) and Duplass and Cruz (2010), and in light of CAEP’s (2013) acknowledgement of the lack of evidence for “a particular set of non-academic qualities that teachers should possess” (p. 11), we believe CAEP should broaden its definition of what constitutes legitimate dispositions assessment.

A striking finding that emerged from the data is the difficulty of engaging students in assessing dispositions in online classes. We find this theme very interesting, especially as many higher education institutions are moving toward online courses. With the institutional
press for online education, the major question in the context of this study, given CAEP’s requirement of dispositional assessment using observable behavior and valid and reliable procedures, is this: how will online TEPs ever adequately comply? Furthermore, even if CAEP accepts NMSU’s rationale for relying on self-assessment of dispositions, NMSU’s process calls for teacher educators to make observable assessment of each candidate’s dispositions. For example, should the candidate rate her or himself at “praxis”, but the teacher educator rate the candidate at “awareness”, the teacher educator is to meet with the candidate to discuss what must be observed in the candidate’s behaviors to rate in the higher category? A physical meeting may be prohibitively difficult in online courses. Our participants’ comments also suggest that when assessing dispositions, teacher educators in online courses may carry less credibility with teacher candidates. Based on these observations, TEPs need to carefully select in which classes the assessment form is used to ensure that dispositional assessment actually and actively broadens self-reflection and dispositions development.

In conclusion, we believe that CAEP’s inclusion of dispositions assessment has promise for ensuring that TEPs prepare quality teachers for our PreK-12 schools. As Gay and Kirkland argued (2003), dispositions areas important as the “mastery of techniques for instructional effectiveness” (p. 181). At present, teachers are engaged in complex, situational, and cultural contexts that require instructional effectiveness as well as professional values, commitments, and ethics to ensure the educational and personal well-being of all students. Our view of the importance of considering dispositions in teacher preparation is reminiscent of Carroll’s (2012) view of dispositions as “the link between teachers’ knowledge and beliefs and their behaviors and action” (p.81). Thus, if TEPs are required to assess dispositions to meet CAEP requirements, it is beneficial that TEPs and the CAEP Commission (2013) consider the assessment of dispositions as a contributor to dispositions development.

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Evaluating the Dispositions of Teacher Education Candidates: A Place for Self-Assessment?

Amneh Al-Rawashdeh & et al.

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Psychological Happiness among Sultan Qaboos University Students in Oman
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Abstract: The aim of this research was to investigate the relation of psychological happiness of Sultan Qaboos University students with some variables using a specific questionnaire that was designed for the purpose of this study. It consisted of 36 items that represent 3 dimensions (personal aspect, academic aspect, and social aspect). The sample included 490 male and female students from all the university colleges (2016–2017 academic year enrolments). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was .84. The findings show that the majority of the students expressed a medium level of happiness (69.8%). Significant relationships between the psychological happiness and gender and type of residence (on-campus, off-campus) were found. However, age, college and region did not significantly correlate with students’ psychological happiness.

Keywords: Psychological happiness, university students, gender, type of residence.

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منال خصيب الفزاري*
جامعة السلطان قابوس، سلطنة عمان

مستخلص: هدفت الدراسة الحالية للكشف عن علاقة السعادة النفسية لدى طلبة جامعة السلطان قابوس بعض المتغيرات حيث تم تطبيق استبانة خاصة تكوّنت من 36 عبارة تشمل ثلاثة محاور (الجانب الشخصي، الجانب الأكاديمي، الجانب الاجتماعي) على عينة مقدارها (490) طالبًا وطالبة من مختلف طلاب الجامعة من يدرسون في العام الأكاديمي (2016/2017). وقد تم حساب مقياس المقياس بالاستناد إلى الطاقة الألفا من كل من المقياس. كما تم استخدام الأساليب الداخلية بطريقة أليافتس تقوم نبات متزوجة حيث بلغت .840. النتائج تثبت أن هناك علاقة وثيقة بين مستوى السعادة النفسية (49.8%). وبالفعل أن المتغير النوع ومكان السكن متزوجي لعب دورًا في تأثير السعادة النفسية. يعيش فيها الطلبة، لم يكن له أي دلالة إحصائية في التأثير على السعادة النفسية.

المصطلحات المفتاحة: السعادة النفسية، طلبة الجامعة، الجنس، نوع السكن.

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Psychological happiness has become a popular topic among scholars as it is an important construct in positive psychology. Since happiness differs across different cultures, genders, and ages, it does not have a unified definition. For instance, Aljammal (2013) states that psychological happiness among Sultan Qaboos University Students in Oman includes achieving high levels of self and life acceptance. Al-Jammal (2013) relies on Ruffy’s description of happiness as it includes feelings of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

The definition of happiness consists of three elements: emotional, social, and cognitive. The emotional component results in positive expression, the social aspect results in expanded positive relationships with others, and the cognitive component leads to positive thinking (Sheikhmoonesi, Zarghami, Khademloo, & Alimohammadi, 2013).

It has been argued that happiness is significant in our lives as it has great positive effects on people. For instance, Alobidi (2015) contends that happiness impacts on people’s behavior, encourages positive and optimistic thinking, and enhances self-esteem, self-actualization, and self-efficacy. Happy people can also deal well with their problems, and provide help and assistance for others in society.

University is the most significant stage in the lives of many students because it helps shape their personalities and develop their values (Abecia et al., 2014). Many students begin their university experience with some form of anxiety or other psychological problems due to the stress of academic life and other difficulties (Yoldascan, Ozenli, Kutlu, Topal, & Bozkurt, 2009). Chan, Miller, and Tcha (2005) argue that university students juggle a heavy load of activities, responsibilities, and obligations as well as selecting courses, managing time, and forming good relationships with other students. Subsequently, all these factors may have an impact on students’ psychological happiness and satisfaction (Chan, et al., 2005).

Problem

University students are future professionals who will eventually provide different services for people in society. Those students are more likely to face different academic challenges and personal difficulties during their studies, so addressing their needs is important (Al-Darmaki, 2003). One of the most fundamental needs is their psychological well-being, or happiness because knowing what makes university students happy gives us an indication that they are satisfied and can cope with their academic lives as well as their personal and social lives. Aljammal (2013) states that psychological well-being also increases the students’ positive attitudes towards their studies as it plays a significant role in predicting the students’ academic achievements at university. It has also been argued that psychological well-being increases the students’ emotional intelligence because people who have a high level of emotional intelligence are happier than those who do not (Judeh, 2007).

Different studies reveal that a variety of factors may affect the level of psychological well-being among university students. For instance, gender plays a significant role in happiness as the level of happiness differs from males and females (Al-Jammal, 2013; Judeh, 2007). The level of happiness is also affected by the age of the students; as the age of the students increases, their level of happiness decreases (Chan et al., 2005). Other sources of happiness include money, good relationships with family and friends, stability of life, and good health (Al-Naggar et al, 2010). Since happiness differs from culture to culture, identifying the definition of happiness in Omani culture and the factors that are related to happiness would be significant as this study is the first of its kind in Oman. Due to the lack of studies in this area among university students in Oman and the dearth of knowledge about the factors related to happiness, it is important to address this topic among a sample of university students.

Significance of the study

The results of this study will add to our knowledge and understanding of happiness in Omani culture and the factors that are related to this topic. It will also add to existing research in this area. Moreover, knowing this information will help policymakers and service providers at universities to initiate the
best solutions and programs to help students deal with life and university demands. The findings will help in the development of the best learning environment to enhance the learning experience of university students. They will also provide a specific tool that will help to measure happiness among university students that suits Omani culture, especially since no existing measurements are available to assess happiness in Oman.

**Objectives of the study**

The purposes of the present study are to:

1. Identify the level of happiness among university sample.
2. Identify any significant differences between happiness and other factors such as gender, type of residence, college, age and region among university students.

**Literature review**

Addressing happiness among university students and its relationship to certain factors has gained great attention from researchers. Some of these factors were found to influence happiness while others were found not to be significant. For instance, in the Arab Gulf countries, psychological happiness among university students was investigated by several researchers. For instance, Al-Jammal (2013) examined the relationship between happiness and its relation to attitudes towards university studies and academic achievement among 258 male and female students aged between 19 and 23 years at Tubook University in Saudi Arabia. This study revealed that gender was a significant factor that affected students’ happiness as there were significant differences between male and female students in some dimensions of the happiness scale for female students, such as in positive relationships with others, and autonomy.

In Kuwait, Abdul-khalek (2006) tested for an association between, and gender differences in happiness, physical health, mental health, and religiosity using self-rating scales among 2,210 male (n = 1,056) and female (n = 1,154) volunteer Kuwaiti undergraduate students. Gender was a significant factor that affected students’ happiness, mental health and religiosity. Males had a significantly higher religiosity mean score of happiness and mental health than females, while females had a significantly higher religiosity mean score than their male counterparts.

In Oman, addressing happiness among women by identifying main areas where they can feel happy was carried out by Varghese (2016). The data was collected from a sample of 500 women using a qualitative structured questionnaire. The study found that Omani women are happier than other women and employment is the factor identified as a significant source of their happiness.

In Jordan, Al Mattarneh (2015) examined the relationship between happiness, social support and self-esteem among a sample of 907 of Mu’tah University students. This sample consisted of 470 male and 473 female students who were from different humanities and scientific colleges. Findings showed that the level of happiness among the students ranged from medium to high. Results also found that gender was a significant factor that affected the students’ happiness. Females were happier than male students. Findings also showed no significant differences among the students due to the college as students from scientific and humanities colleges had the same level of happiness. This study also revealed positive interaction between happiness, social support and self-esteem.

Judeh (2007) explored emotional intelligence and its relationship with happiness and self-confidence among 231 male and female students of Al-Aqsa University in Gaza city. Results revealed that the majority of the students expressed a good level of happiness (63.1%). This study also found that emotional intelligence was positively related to happiness and self-confidence.

Jaisri (2015) addressed happiness and its relation to self-esteem among a random sample of 500 college students in India. Happiness was tested using Oxford happiness scale. Results of this study revealed that gender was a significant factor that affected students' happiness as male students were found to be happier than female students. This could be because of the traditional role of gender in the Indian society as women feel insecure regardless of the advancement and changes that have occurred. As such, this negatively impacted women’s happiness and well-being.

Cavalcanti, Guimarães and Nogueira (2009) examined the level of happiness in two coun-
tries among college students in America (Purdue University) and Brazil (Universidade Federal de Pernambuco) using 185 questionnaires. Results found that American students reported a higher level of happiness. Findings also found significant gender differences in both countries. Women were happier than men in America, while men were happier than women in Brazil.

A study by Shafiq, Naz, Ansar, Nasrulla, Bushra, and Imam (2015) investigated the relationship between happiness and a range of factors such as age, and area of residence among 100 students between the ages of 18 and 24 at the University of Gujrat in Pakistan. The result of this study found that age and region of residence (rural, urban) were not significant factors that influenced happiness. This is because, although the students came from different background they have experienced fair environment at the university.

Sheikhmoonesi et al. (2013) examined the level of happiness of 208 medical students at the Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences in Iran using the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire. The students were aged between 18 and 31 years. This study also investigated the relationship between happiness and various factors such as gender, marital status, and residential status (place of living). The findings suggested no relationship between happiness and three factors: gender, marital status, and residential status.

Generally, these studies address psychological happiness among samples of university students in different cultures. They differ in their findings; culture has its own significant factors that influence happiness. So, addressing happiness and the factors that might affect happiness among university students in Oman has not yet been addressed. The present study will focus on this topic.

Method

Sample

This study was carried out with the help of a Convenience sample consisting of 519 undergraduate students enrolled at Sultan Qaboos University from different colleges. Twenty-nine questionnaires were not included in the sample because they were incomplete. So, 490 students participated in the actual study. Data collection was conducted among the students during the Fall semester in 2016. All the students who attended classes during the data collection period agreed to participate in the study. They were asked to fill in the questionnaires at the beginning of the timetable session, which lasted between 15 and 20 minutes. Participants were given an introduction about the study, its goals, and what was requested from them.

Some missing data were reported; as such the sample consisted of 209 male students and 268 female students between the ages of 16 and 25 years. The students came from humanities colleges (151) and scientific colleges (337). Of those students, 305 were in their second and third year, whereas 191 were in their fourth and fifth year. They were from different regions in Oman: Muscat (60), North Alsharqayia (50), South Alsharqayia (39), North Albatinah (78), South Albatinah (67), Althahirah (51), and Aldakilia (122).

Instruments

In the present study, happiness is defined as a construct that consists of three dimensions: emotional, social, and cognitive. The first dimension is about personal aspects and it includes the signs and indicators that reflect a sense of the individual’s positivity, satisfaction, and acceptance of self as well as achievement of life goals. The second component is about academic life and it reflects a sense of enjoyment in academic studies as well as with relationships with family and friends. The third dimension is about social life and it includes a sense of value of life and the ability to make good relationships with people in society as well as participating and volunteering in activities that serve the community and people. Happiness was measured in this study using a specific questionnaire that is designed for the purpose of this research based on studies by Al-Jammal (2013), Judeh (2007, and Katalo (2015).

This study used the quantitative approach, which means a broad survey was used to collect data for the study. The research included a survey designed by the current researcher to examine happiness. This questionnaire was designed for the purpose of this study considering the literature related to happiness and it consisted of 36 items using a 5-point Likert Scale of 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disa-
gree). The questionnaire was designed based on some studies that reported a high reliability of the happiness’ questionnaire using alpha coefficient that ranged between 0.67 and 0.93 (Al-Jammal, 2013; Judeh, 2007; Katalo, 2015).

To help design the questionnaire for this study, the researcher distributed an open question about the meaning of happiness for university students, including a sample from the College of Education. The students formed their understanding about happiness in regards to self, academic life, and social aspects. They provided varied and important ideas about their happiness and this information helped to develop the dimension and the items for happiness.

The demographic data that was collected at the beginning of the testing session included gender, age, name of college, year of study, type of residency, and name of the region.

The questionnaire includes three dimensions, as identified in the literature. The first dimension is about personal aspects and it is used to assess the students’ satisfaction about self and their goals in life. This dimension is comprised of 15 items. Examples of the items are, “I feel positive about myself”, “I have high self-confidence”, and “I feel satisfied with what I have achieved in life”. The second dimension is about academic aspects and it consists of 10 items to assess the students’ satisfaction with their academic studies as well as their relationships with other students and friends. It also gauges their satisfaction with the university facilities. Examples are, “I feel proud about my academic achievement at the university”, “I am enjoying my time with my friends at the university”, and “I feel satisfied with the facilities at the university”.

The third element is about social aspects and it consists of 11 items that include the students’ relationships with others in society. Examples of the items include, “I have strong relationships with my family”, “I am enjoying my time with my family”, and “I cooperate with other people in society”. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha, which was obtained from the sample data for the happiness questionnaire and its three dimensions. The reliability of the questionnaire was 0.84, with 0.73 for the personal aspects dimension, 0.65 for the academic dimension, and 0.69 for the social dimension, which indicates a good reliability status for the questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Data from the surveys was analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Before the analysis, data was checked and cleaned to ensure that it had been entered correctly and that no values seemed outside the possible range of each scale. Also, data was screened to check for missing and extreme values. Data checking involved going through the data entries to ensure that there were no entry errors. Two statistical procedures were used for the data analysis: descriptive and inferential.

The current study examined happiness among university student sample considering some variables. To assess the level of happiness among the university sample, the normal distribution of the study sample was first approved as the data showed that mean and median are nearly equal (Mean=3.84, Median=3.844, SD=.372, Skeness=-.17).

We relied on standard deviation as a criterion based on a scale of (1 to 5), as such [one standard deviation above the mean = (3.84+.370=4.21)]. This means that those who scored above 4.21 were considered to be happy. And [one standard deviation below the mean = (3.84-.370=3.47)] means any score below 3.47 was considered as less happy. Therefore, the range of score between 4.21 and 3.47 was considered as medium level of happiness. Individuals who scored two standard deviation above the mean (≥ 4.58) were considered to be very happy. It should be noted that none of the students have scored more than 4.58.

So, the findings showed that the majority of the students expressed a medium level of happiness (69.8%). In regards to the dimensions of the questionnaire, the students were found to have a medium level of happiness in their social aspects (M= 3.98, SD=.451), personal aspects (M= 3.80, SD=.421), and their academic life (M= 3.73, SD=.494). These findings mean that students at Sultan Qaboos University are happy. This is a good indication that the university provides students with a good learning environment and that those students are happy in their social life, particularly their relationship with their families and other activities in society. They feel satisfied with themselves and their goals in life. Stu-
dents are coping well with academic life and feeling comfortable about their relationship with their friends. The result of this study is similar to that of Judeh (2007) who found that university students expressed a good level of happiness.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to examine differences in gender and type of residence among the university sample. Gender was found to be significant. This result showed that happiness was affected by gender as there were significant differences in the level of happiness between male and female students. Female students (M= 3.99, SD=.581) were happier than male students (M= 3.622, SD=.584). (See Table 1).

Similarly, there were significant differences among university students across the personal and academic dimensions, except for the social aspects. Female students (M=3.86, SD=.416) were happier than male students (M=3.72, SD=.424) in their personal aspects. Female students (M=3.83, SD=.457) were also happier than male students (M=3.61, SD=.508) in their academic aspects (See Table 1). From these findings, it could be interpreted that female students are goal-oriented and know how to achieve what they want. They are most likely to feel satisfied with what they want as they are well organized. Most of the girls at the university also stay on-campus so they enjoy the services that the university offer. This result is consistent with the result of other studies (Al-Jamal, 2013; Al Mattarneh, 2015; Judeh, 2007) in which the level of happiness was found to be affected by gender where female students were found to be happier than males.

The social aspect was not significant because university students spend most of their time at university, and they are most likely to be isolated from society and its activities, especially during the academic year. So, it is not surprising that the students do not engage a lot in the social life and, for this, they score low in the social dimension.

Type of residence (on-campus and off-campus) was also related to happiness as there were significant differences between the students who live on and off campus in their level of happiness. Students who live on-campus (M= 3.90, SD=.359) reported a higher level of happiness than those who live off-campus (M= 3.78, SD=.372).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>.424</td>
<td>3.58**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>.416</td>
<td>4.95**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>4.95**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td>3.95**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>.584</td>
<td>3.95**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>.584</td>
<td>3.95**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<.01

Similarly, there were significant differences among university students across the personal and academic happiness dimensions with regards to the type of residence, except the social element. Students who live on-campus were happier (M=3.86, SD=.426) than those who live off-campus (M= 3.75, SD=.407) in their personal aspects. Similarly, students who live on-campus (M=3.85, SD=.461) were also happier than those who live off-campus (M=3.63, SD=.500) in their academic aspects. (See Table 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Residences</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>On Campus</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>.426</td>
<td>2.79**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspects</td>
<td>Off Campus</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>.407</td>
<td>4.87**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>On Campus</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>.461</td>
<td>4.87**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspects</td>
<td>Off Campus</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>.500</td>
<td>3.53**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>On Campus</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.359</td>
<td>3.53**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Off Campus</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>.372</td>
<td>3.53**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<.01

From these findings, it could be interpreted that students who live off campus tend to share rooms with other students, so this could add pressure on how they deal with their friends with regards to studying and living. This will have a negative effect on their relationships with others. Since those students rent apartments and houses outside the university, they feel unsettled as they must do their own housework and cooking. This adds more responsibilities and pressure to those students. They might feel unsatisfied with themselves and their goals. Some of them also might face difficulties in studying and managing their time. Therefore, they face some difficulties at the university. Such pressures could negatively impact students' satisfaction and well-being.

However, those students who live on-campus enjoy all the facilities that are provided to
them by the university. Food and other services are offered by the university for free. They also have the convenience of traveling and moving around the campus by walking or sometimes using university buses. They are most likely able to manage their time and academic studies, which positively impacts their achievements at the university and their life goals.

It is also significant to note that independent samples t-test were also conducted on age, college, and region. Surprisingly, no significant difference between students of all different ages was found. This means that all the students at the university are happy regardless of their age. This result is consistent with the findings of the study by Shafiq et al. (2015) and it contradicts the findings of the study of Chan, et al. (2005) and Sheikhmoonesi et al. (2013), who found that the level of happiness was affected by age. As the age of the students increases, the level of happiness decreases.

Moreover, the colleges attended by the students did not affect their happiness as there were no significant differences between students from the scientific and the humanities colleges. This means that students from all the colleges have the same level of happiness and they are happy students. This could be interpreted as the students of both scientific and humanities colleges feel satisfied about themselves, cope well with their academic studies and as well as feel happy about their academic studies. This also means that field or type of studies does not play any role in happiness. This finding is consistent with a study by Al Mattarneh (2015) who revealed that the psychological happiness of the students was not affected by college.

Region was also not found to be significant, which indicates that all students from all the regions share the same level of happiness. This could be because all the students from all areas in Oman share similar life styles and ways of living, as such their level of being satisfied about themselves, academic studies and social life. This finding is consistent with the studies by Shafiq et al. (2015) and Sheikhmoonesi et al. (2013) who revealed that the psychological happiness of the students was not affected by where they came from.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the relationship between psychological happiness and other variables. It found that the students at Sultan Qaboos University are generally happy. This is a good indication that the university provides its students with a good learning environment. Happiness was influenced by gender and type of residency, which were found to be significant factors. Age, college, and region were not correlated with happiness.

Recommendations and Limitations

This study recommends that service providers at the university address the needs of male students and students who live off-campus so they can investigate factors and obstacles that might affect their happiness. Individual and group counseling might also be helpful in dealing with students who are in need. More research is needed to examine other factors that might affect happiness. Moreover, the mixed method approach is needed to strengthen the quantitative data. The qualitative research approach would be beneficial as it might add depth to the questionnaire findings. However, there are some limitations to this study. Since this study involved a convenient sample, it is difficult to generalize the results of this study to all university students or to the wider population as the sample covered only a specific population of university students. Another limitation is that, this study relies on the students’ self-report data; as such this might not reflect their actual or real response to the questions.

References


Differential Item Functioning in Students Rating of Teaching Effectiveness Surveys in Higher Education According to Academic Disciplines: Data from a Saudi University

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Abstract: This study explored academic discipline as a source of differential item functioning (DIF) in students’ rating of teaching quality and effectiveness at higher education institutions. Data utilized in this study was collected by Imam Abudalruman Bin Faisal University - KSA. The total number of surveys analyzed for the purpose of this study is 36459 from three colleges: Education, Health, and Engineering. Using Extended Rasch model (Rating Scale Model), the results show that the instrument contains four DIF items. The content of these four items confirm the possibility of considering discipline as a source of DIF items in students evaluation of teaching in higher education. Moreover, the results of the current study show that removing DIF items from the instrument increases construct validity.

Keywords: Differential item functioning, student’s rating of teaching, quality, higher education.

Keywords: الأداء التفاضلي لمفقرات في استبانات تقييم الطلابية للفاعلية التدريسية في التعليم العالي حسب حقل المعرفة الأكاديمي، بيانات من جامعة سعودية

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Higher education institutes have developed relatively complex procedures and instruments for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data about institutional performance (Penny, 2003). As a result, students evaluation of teaching (SET) has become an increasingly common practice in higher education institutes as a measure of institutional performance and system effectiveness (Goos, & Salomons, 2017; Wachtel, 1998; Chen & Ho-shower, 2003; Clayson, 2009; Berk, 2005). SETs are often used for critical decisions, such as retention, tenure, and promotion of faculty (Kogan, Schoenfeld-Tacher, & Hellyer, 2010). Therefore, reliability and validity of SETs surveys should be given sufficient consideration in order to achieve the intended purpose (Oon, Spencer, & Kam, 2017). The way SETs items are worded will have an effect on the usefulness of the collected information (Marsh, 2007).

As the teaching process is a mix of several components that should be covered by SETs items, there is a possibility that some items in SETs might be worded in a way that suits one college over another; when SETs items ask students to rate pedagogical practices of teachers, college of education students could assign different meanings of these items when compared with their colleagues from another colleges. Marsh (1984, 2007) and Marsh and Roche (1997) showed the SETs surveys are multidimensional, and differential item functioning (DIF) could be the reasons behind SETs multidimensionality (Camilli & Shepard, 2007). Since DIF is a major threat of validity and reliability (Duncan, 2006; Monahan, 2002), the current study aims at exploring and examining students' academic disciplines as a source of DIF in SETs and the effect of detected DIF items on the validity. Ory and Ryan (2001) recommended that greater attention should be directed toward consequential validity, particularly the matters of how ratings are used on today's campuses and what happens as a result.

Research indicates that students are a qualified source to report on the extent to which the learning experience was productive, informative, satisfying or worthwhile (Archibong, & Nja, 2011). Therefore, students evaluation of teaching, courses, and programs are used almost in every university, and after the data is collected, reports are generated across instructors, departments, and colleges and viewed as evidence of teaching effectiveness that is then used for professional decisions (Sproule, 2000).

There are research studies that have skeptical point of views about SETs (Uttl, White, & Gonzalez, 2016; Rienties, 2014; Martin, 1998; McPherson & Jewell, 2007; Watchel, 1998, Weinberg, Fleisher, & Hashimoto, 2007; Gump, 2007), and there are many who support and trust such evaluations (Yao & Grady, 2005; Spencer & Flyr, 1992; Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007; Gump, 2007). Despite this controversy, such evaluations are seen by many as a valuable and beneficial tool to improve teaching and student learning outcomes (Lattuca, & Domagal-Goldman, 2007; Dommeyer, Baum, Hanna, & Chapman, 2004). To maximize the SET benefits, Rantanen (2013) suggests applying SET surveys to suitable courses for each teacher, while Giles and colleagues (2004) recommend student partnership in designing and implementing evaluations.

Reviewing the related literature shows that there are many variables that influence SETs: Grades or expected grades (Griffin, Hilton III, Plummer, & Barret, 2014, Badri et al., 2006; Brockx, Spooren, & Mortelmans, 2011), gender (MacNell, Driscoll, & Hunt, 2015; Badri, Abdulla, Kamali, & Dodeen, 2006), teachers' characteristics (Wolbring & Riordan, 2016; Clayson & Sheffet, 2006; Patrick, 2011; Greimel-Fuhrmann, & Geyer, 2003; Shevlin, Banyard, Davies, & Griffiths, 2000),), classroom size and response rate (Al Kuwaiti, Alquraan, & Subbarayalu, 2016; Koh & Tan, 1997; Badri et al., 2006), course difficulty (Addison, Best, & Warrington, 2006), course level (Santhanam & Hicks, 2002), course type (Beran & Violato, 2005), general versus specific education (Ting, 2000) and course syllabus tone (Harnish & Bridges, 2011). Also, students' academic discipline is one of the factors that has a significant effect on SETs (Neumann, 2001; Chen & Watkins, 2010; Basow & Montgomery, 2005), and the wording of SET items could be one of the causes behind the effect of students' discipline on SETs as shown by Anders and colleagues (2016). This implies that some items might be worded to be understood in a different way based on students' discipline. In psychometric
terms; students' endorsement of an option on a Likert scale item could be influenced by students' discipline rather than what the survey measures, which means that students' discipline could be a source of differential item functioning (DIF). DIF means the notion that students in different colleges (e.g. education vs engineering) respond differently to an item, even though they share the same trait level. This study contributes to this effort by examining the possibility of discipline, or field of study, as a source of DIF which is a threat to survey validity and reliability.

The probability of endorsing an option or point in a rating scale item should be determined by the latent trait (e.g. teaching effectiveness) measured by the survey that said item comes from. When the probability of selecting an option on the item for two respondents who have the same trait level is not the same and they are from different groups (different disciplines or field of study) then the item could be biased or its function is not the same across these groups, and this item is a DIF item. Raju and Ellis (2002) indicate that detecting DIF means examining the degree to which two survey takers with identical standing on the latent trait but from different groups (e.g. male and female) have the same probability of choosing the same option on the item.

There are several methods that could be used to detect DIF: Analysis of variance method, transformed item difficulty, item discrimination index, chi square, Mantel Haenzel, and Item response theory methods. One of the strong applications of item response theory is detecting DIF (Hambleton & Swaminathan, 1985). Based on IRT, the item which does not have the same Item Characteristic Curve (ICC) for different groups is considered to be functioning differently between these groups. Different ICCs mean that instrument takers who have the same level of a measured trait do not have the same probability of endorsing the same item (Embrestone & Reise, 2000; Camilli & Shepard, 1994).

Method

Instrument

In this study, a course Evaluation Survey (CES) was used to collect the data. CES contains 14 five-point Likert Scale items divided into two subscales (instructor and course related items), and it is approved by Imam Abudalruman Bin Faisal University and adopted by Saudi National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) for accreditation purposes. CES was developed by a panel of experts in related areas, and several studies investigated its psychometric properties and usefulness (Al Rubaish, Wosornu, & Dwivedi, 2012; Al Rubaish, Wosornu, & Dwivedi, 2011; Al-Kuwaiti & Maruthamuthu, 2014). Additionally, Corrected-Item-To-Total Correlation and Cronbach's Alpha were calculated from a random sample (n=50) selected from the current data. The results show that Cronbach's Alpha equals (0.963) and the Corrected-Item-To-Total Correlation ranges from (0.568 to 0.888) which adds evidence for the reliability and the validity of CES.

Data collection

The data used in this study is part of data collected by Imam Abudalruman Bin Faisal University during the academic year 2013/2014 for accreditation and monitoring purposes which is going to be submitted to NCAAA. Imam Abudalruman Bin Faisal University through the Deanship of Quality and Academic Accreditation has developed a special application called “UDQUEST” (https://udquest.uod.edu.sa/Login/index.html) that is used electronically to collect data related to many different issues at the university.

One of the surveys available in UDQUEST is the Course Evaluation Survey (CES). This survey is used to evaluate instructors and courses at the university, and is distributed every semester to all students registered in every course offered that semester. The number of electronic surveys analyzed in this study is 36459, and the number of courses evaluated is 866 from 21 colleges and 7 campuses (the same college might be in more than one campus) at the Imam Abudalruman Bin Faisal University. At Imam Abudalruman Bin Faisal University, the colleges are grouped in four different clusters (Health colleges cluster, Engineering colleges cluster, Science and Administration colleges cluster, and Arts and Education colleges cluster). For the purpose of this study, three clusters were selected randomly. Therefore, the data analyzed in the current study are from colleges of: education, engineering, and health. Most
of the selected colleges are available at more than one campus.

**Research questions**

1. Does the SET’s survey contain DIF items based on students’ academic discipline?
2. What is the effect of detected DIF items on the SET’s internal structure validity?

**Data analysis**

For the purpose of this study, the Extended Rasch Model using the RUMM2020 program was used. The model deals with the possibility of different thresholds between the categories (Andrich, 1988, 2005; Ostini & Nering, 2006), and Rasch model helps users to develop scales with strong psychometric properties including greater generalizability (Embreston & Reise, 2000; Hambleton, Swaminathan, & Rogers, 1991). It enables users to create an interval scale of scores for both items and persons (ability) that are sample independent and interially measured (Bond & Fox, 2001). These scores are reported in units called logits and are typically placed on a vertical ruler called “logistic ruler”. The interpretation of the logits is similar to z-score as person and item logits range from minus three to plus three with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. The minus values indicate lower performing persons and easy items (easy to be endorsed item), whereas the plus values indicate higher performing persons and more difficult items. The logistic ruler measures persons’ abilities on one side of the ruler and item difficulties on the other. Because logits can be added, subtracted, multiplied, and divided, comparisons and statistical studies can be made and that makes it useful for showing educational gains, displaying strengths and weaknesses, and comparing groups. One test can be compared with another and people’s ability measures may be also compared with different tests (RUMM Laboratory, 2005).

**Results**

**CES Scale Fitting Results**

All CES items were used in the analysis, and the results showed that the Person Separation index (IRT equivalent of Cronbach Alpha) is 0.873. This means that about 13% of the variability is due to measurement error, or 87.3% of the variance is accounted by the model.

Unidimensionality as an assumption of using Rasch Model was assessed using factor analysis with the ratio of first-to-second eigenvalue greater than 2 (Slocum-Gori & Zumbo, 2011). The results show that there are two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 and that explain 55% of the variance. The first factor’s eigenvalue 6.02 explains 43% of the variance and the second one 1.68 explains 12% of the variance. The first-to-second ratio is 3.58, which indicates that the unidimensionality assumption is met.

**Detecting Differential Item Functioning (DIF)**

To answer the first research question “Does the SET survey contain DIF items based on students’ academic discipline?” , the possibility of discipline differences in responses to CES items was tested by DIF analysis with a Bonferroni-adjusted value \( p = 0.0035 \) using RUMM2020 program. RUMM 2020 uses Two Way ANOVA on the item location to assess DIF for every item where the main effects are the discipline (cluster) and the class interval (trait level). The part of the ANOVA Table of interest is the interaction between Class Interval (trait level) and Group (Discipline). If there is a significant interaction, this means that students from the same trait level and different disciplines endorse the item differently, and that is considered evidence of DIF. The summary of this analysis is shown in Table 1. Because of the multiple comparisons involved (14 items), the alpha level is adjusted using the Bonferroni correction due to the number of items yield an alpha of \( 0.05/14 = 0.0035 \) (Thompson, 2006).
Table 1 shows that CES has 4 items with a significant ability by discipline interaction (DIF) after applying the Bonferroni correction which takes into account the familywise error. These items are: 1- My professor used up-to-date and useful course materials (texts, handouts, references, etc.), 2- My professor inspired me to do my best work, 3- My professor gave me the marks for continuous assessment on time, and 4- My professor provided effective IT (Information Technology) to support my learning. Figures 1-4 show Item Characteristics Curves (ICC) for each DIF item.
Cubital tunnel syndrome is a condition that occurs when the ulnar nerve is compressed as it passes under the ligaments of the elbow. The ulnar nerve is responsible for supplying sensations to the little finger and half of the ring finger, as well as voluntary movements of the muscles of the hand. The compression of the nerve can cause pain, numbness, tingling, and weakness in the hand and fingers. It is important to diagnose and treat cubital tunnel syndrome promptly to prevent permanent nerve damage.

**Figure 1:** A diagram of the ulnar nerve and the cubital tunnel, highlighting the area where the nerve is compressed.

**Figure 2:** A photograph of a patient with symptoms of cubital tunnel syndrome, showing muscle weakness in the affected hand.

**Figure 3:** A graph showing the electrical activity in the muscles of the hand, demonstrating reduced nerve conduction in the affected area.

**Figure 4:** An image of the surgical procedure used to relieve pressure on the ulnar nerve. This procedure is called a cubital tunnel release.

**Figure 5:** A post-operative x-ray showing the corrected alignment of the elbow and the resolution of nerve compression.
Table 2: Fit Indices for the two models (After and Before Deleting DIF items)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fit Indices</th>
<th>Before deleting DIF items</th>
<th>After Deleting DIF items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Cl: 95%</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
<td>51153.26</td>
<td>22831.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSEA</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECVI</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.38-1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FO</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.38-1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCF</td>
<td>51063.26</td>
<td>50320.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>51153.26</td>
<td>22831.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
<td>DF=90</td>
<td>DF=44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the following fit indices for the two models: Chi-Squared ($\chi^2$), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Expected Cross-Validation Index (ECVI), Population Discrepancy Function Value (F0), and Estimated Non-centrality Parameter (NCP). Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger and Müller (2003) indicated that two CFA models can be compared by calculating the $\chi^2$ difference of the models. Table 2 shows that the $\chi^2$ differences equals (28321.52) and DF equals (44) and this difference is statistically significant at $\alpha=.01$. Also, by taking the other fit indices into account, Table 2 suggests that removing DIF items from CES has improved the fit indices of the model. This indicates that eliminating DIF items has improved the construct validity of the instrument.

**Discussion**

After more than seven decades of research on SETs in higher education, most researchers believe that they are reliable, valid, and useful (Wachtel, 1998). This study provides evidence that disciplines or students' college could be a source of item bias or DIF which indicates that students who have the same level of ability or ratings of teaching effectiveness but one from different disciplines or colleges understand and perceive some items in CES differently and therefore they respond to these items in a different manner. The results of this study show that there are four items that are performed differently by students' discipline after controlling for the level of perceived teaching effectiveness. This type of error (DIF items) is a major threat of instrument validity and reliability (Duncan, 2006; Monahan, 2002). This result supports with the results of Marsh (1984, 2007) and Marsh and Roche (1997) whose studies focused on the importance of wording SETs items to prevent CESs surveys from multidimensionality. Therefore, higher education institutes should use and prepare surveys to assess teaching and teachers that are free of DIF items. In other words the items should be perceived or understood in the same way despite students' college or discipline.

One of the items that showed DIF in CES is "My professor used up-to-date and useful course materials (texts, hand-outs, references, etc.)." The content of this item focuses on using up-to-date references and texts. Since the colleges included in the current study are Engineering, Health, and Education, it is expected that the importance of using up-to-date references and texts to be different according the students' college. The need for up-to-date references and texts for the engineering students is more important than it is for college of education students. This could explain why students from different colleges perceive different meanings of this item's contents, and therefore the results show that it has a DIF. Another item that has a DIF in CES according to the current study is "My professor used effective IT (Information Technology) to support my learning". Although, using IT to enhance learning is needed for all students despite their college, the volume of this need might be different from one college to another. The real practices in classrooms at the university show more IT involvement by college of engineering teachers compared to their colleagues at college of education. This might be the reason behind the existence of DIF for this item.

Also, the results show that removing the detected DIF items from CES enhances its construct validity. Unfortunately, Oon and colleagues (2017) reported that SETs are rarely assessed psychometrically which might lead to potential consequences by providing inaccurate and invalid information, and therefore SETs' results for courses and teachers cannot be justified. Based on the results of this study, it is recommended to investigate DIF sources in SETs' surveys and make sure that the surveys used by higher education institutes are free of DIF items. Fairness of the SETs' surveys is questionable when these surveys contain DIF items.

**Conclusions and Implications for further Research**

The current study has shown evidence that some Likert-type items in the SET survey function differently across students' college,
and the CFA has shown that removing the detected DIF items from SET survey enhances its internal structure validity. Since the current study is based on one data set (N=36459) and one university’s experience, it is recommended to conduct more research using different data sets from different universities. Also, it is recommended to examine other possible sources of DIF in SET surveys according to other variables such as students’ level, gender, and GPA.

References


Student Attitudes toward Career Counseling Services at Sultan Qaboos University

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Abstract: This study investigated student attitudes toward career counseling services at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). A total of 134 full-time undergraduate students took part in the study. Using Rochlen, Mohr, and Hargrove’s (1999) Attitudes Toward Career Counseling Services (ATCCS) scale, student attitudes were obtained. ATCCS was adapted to Arabic. Reliability scores for the subscales (Value: \( \alpha = .83 \), Stigma: \( \alpha = .70 \)). Both genders indicated moderate to high value for career services, with no significant gender difference. Also, there was no significant gender difference in stigma for seeking career services nor stigma was found. Both genders showed low levels of stigma. There was a negative relationship between value and stigma scales. Results indicated no significant differences due to year in college in levels of value and stigma. Location of the center and marketing of services negatively influenced students’ willingness to seek career services. Results are discussed and directions for further research are provided.

Keywords: Attitudes, SQU, career counseling, stigma, Oman.

المجتمعي: بحث الدراسة الحالية بحث اتجاهات الطلبة نحو خدمات التوجيه الوظيفي في جامعة السلطان قابوس. شارك في الدراسة 134 طالبًا. وقد تم استخدام مقياس الاتجاهات نحو الاستشارة الوظيفي الذي تم تصميمه إلى اللغة العربية. وبلغت قيم ألفا 83 و 70. حصل على خصائص القيمة والوصمة على التوالي. أظهر الطلاب والطالبات إلى قيمة متوسطة إلى مرتفعة لخدمة التوجيه التوظيفي ولكن دون وجود فرق جوهري بين الجنسين. كما لم تظهر فروقات ترجع إلى النوع في درجات الوصمة، ولكن هناك تفوقات درجات الوصمة متدنية لحكمة الجنسين. أظهرت النتائج وجود اختلافات في درجات الوصمة. ولم تظهر الدراسة فروقات في درجات طبقة من القيمة أو الوصمة ترجع إلى سنوات الدراسة. وقد طرحنا لموقع المركز وتسويق الخدمات تأثير سلبي على رغبة الطلبة في السعي وراء خدمات الاتجاهات. تم مناقشة النتائج والاتجاهات المستقبلية في البحث.

المصطلحات المفتاحية: الاتجاهات، جامعة السلطان قابوس، الإرشاد المهني، الوصمة، سلطنة عمان

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Culture and student university life at SQU

Oman is an Arab country located in the Middle-East. Like most Arab and Asian cultures, the overarching culture is collectivistic in which the family is the backbone of individuals’ lives (Dwairy et al., 2006). Adherence to family rules and making sure that one is in line with family expectations is very crucial to most Omanis (Al-Bahrami, 2004). For instance, middle school students usually spend a considerable time discussing with their families whether to take more arts or life sciences subjects, and usually the decision is a combination of a number of factors such as student academic performance, family opinions, and future prospects of the job market. One study found that permissive and authoritative parenting styles were directly related to academic well-being, indicating a strong parental involvement in academic decision making (Alhafri, 2011). It is not surprising that university students rely on their personal efforts and family members to help in major choices, with less reliance on professional help seeking.

SQU is currently the only governmental university in Oman. It accepts students from both genders, different SES, and different ability statuses. Male and female students study together in shared classrooms where males usually sit in the front and females prefer sitting at the back of the classroom. Most of the majors at SQU are taught in English, and there are a few majors that are taught in Arabic, such as education and the liberal arts. Most female students live in on-campus dorms while males live out of campus. At SQU, there is a myriad of extracurricular activities where both genders participate in such a way that conforms with the religious and cultural values of the society. Students are assigned to a major once they are admitted to SQU but they are given the opportunity to explore and switch to different majors, particularly during the first 3 years. Therefore, it is not uncommon for SQU students to experience the difficulty of choosing and switching between majors, and they normally do that with the help of their academic advisors.

There is scarce research investing the dynamics of career decision-making among Omani university students. One investigation of help seeking among distressed Omani women in health institutions found that most patients considered cultural beliefs to be a barrier to help seeking, particularly in relation to personal lives; “Some informants explained that it was inappropriate culturally to talk to the doctor about their private lives” (Al-Busaidi, 2010, p.195). A number of studies (e.g., Al-Bahrami 2004; Al-Darmaki, 2003, 2011a & 2011b) have been conducted in Oman and United Arab Emirates (UAE) to investigate student counseling services help seeking processes. The studies revealed that seeking professional psychological help among university students was influenced by factors such as family, personal efforts, stigma, culture, and religion. They also indicated a general low attitude towards help seeking due to the influence of the aforementioned factors.

The few available studies revealed that social stigma, cultural beliefs, self-reliance, and family help are among the significant barriers to professional help seeking in Oman. Though both cultures Oman and UAE have some similarities, there is a need for more research pertaining to attitudes toward general and career counseling services in Oman. This also suggests that more research is needed to explore other possible barriers to promote professional seeking among college students. Some of the variables pertain to different types of stigma, outreach strategies, and location of services. More specifically, university student career decision-making can create emotional strain and may lead to poor choices (Zikic & Saks, 2009).

Importance of professional help seeking

People seek counseling for a number of reasons, and transition from school to college, in particular, can engender a great deal of anxiety, distress, and homesickness (Berman, and Sperling, 1991; Elzubeir, Elzubeir, and Magzoub, 2010). Many college students come to counseling services for obvious reasons and may discover that other underlying factors are affecting the quality of their lives. College students were reportedly suffering from a number of psychological health problems and considerable distress (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). College life is characterized by important decision-making processes such as choice of a college major, academic performance concerns, and job search skills (Adams, 2012).

Among the significant resources that can help reduce an important aspect of student anxiety is university career services. They are considered among the most crucial services in any
university (McGrath, 2002). Gobel (2014) explains that enabling students to find decent jobs is the ultimate goal of universities, and university career services play a key role in this effort. According to Fouad et al. (2006), most students face difficulties related to career decisions-making and mental health issues. Student psychological distress was strongly related to career concerns, but only half of students had clear ideas about university career services. Similarly, most of the students seeking career services suffered from psychological distress among other problems (Lucas, and Berken, 2005).

Examining the economic value of career services among Korean college students, Choi, Lee, Kim, Kim, Cho, and Min Lee (2013) concluded that students were willing to seek individual career counseling even if they had to pay. Despite the various free services offered by university career services, the number of students seeking career services is disproportionate in relation to the total student population (Amrein, 2013).

Attitudes towards help seeking among college students

Attitudes and beliefs about something are important influencing factors of behavior (Vroom, 1946 as cited in Pinder, 1998). Outcome expectations of a professional help accounted for about 62% of the reasons college students seek counseling (Vogel, Wester, Wei, & Boysen, 2005). Vogel et al. argued that the extent students felt they made use of psychological help could predict students’ behaviors towards the helping profession. Pheko, Chilisa, Balogun, and Kgathi (2013) similarly examined college students’ attitudes towards counseling, and concluded that attitudes towards help seeking were influenced by self and social stigmas. In Oman, Al-Bahran (2004) investigated the help seeking processes among SQU students, and found that cultural norms and religion were two main factors helping students deal with their psychological problems, particularly in relation to homesickness and academic demands. However, Al-Bahran asserted that culture and religion were only coping mechanisms, meaning that these two may not always help in adjustment. The study added that SQU students were in need of higher levels of awareness regarding the significance of professional help seeking. In a similar vein, Emirati students’ preferences for help seeking were self-reliance, family, and friends. Students believed that those sources were the first help seeking options. Interestingly, academic advisors were considered a priority over professional counselors with regards to help seeking (Al-Darmaki, 2003, 2011a, & 2011b). In Kuwait, Al-Rowaie (2001) studied attitudes towards help seeking among Kuwaiti university students. Females and students with psychology background had a more positive attitude towards help seeking than male students and other students who did not take psychology courses. Years before that, Soliman (1993) found that “counselors, academic counselors, or social workers are least sought-out for help” (p.77). The general findings were that professional help seeking is not at the core of help seeking processes among Arab university students.

Barriers to help seeking: The role of stigma

The role of family and cultural values are among factors influencing help seeking practices (Kim, and Omizo, 2003, Al-Bahran, 2004, & Al-Darmaki 2011a). Kim and Omizo (2003) found that adherence to the Asian value of self-restraint negatively affected help seeking behaviors among Asian Americans. Asian American students had low attitudes towards counseling as not to show signs of weakness. It is clear that stigma was linked to low motivation towards seeking counseling services. For instance, Ludwikowski et al. (2009) found that self and public stigma discouraged many college students from seeking career counseling. In particular, Vogel, Wade, and Hacker (2007) found that self-stigma influenced students’ attitudes towards seeking professional help. Moreover, Pheko et al (2013) reported that college students in Botswana were not as motivated to see a counselor when facing career problems. In a similar study, Miville and Constantine (2007) investigated the reasons why Asian American college girls did not seek counseling during college experience, particularly looking at the influence of the family’s collectivistic culture in help seeking. Researchers found that the stigma and values associated with help seeking among Asian families negatively influenced members’ intentions toward counseling help seeking. Ludwikowski et al. (2009) investigated the commonalities between personal and career counseling and how attitudes towards each may be different.
Researchers assumed that the presence of problems and self-disclosure are the main similarities between these two types of counseling, believing that attitudes towards both were quite similar.

Ferrera (2014) studied athlete students’ attitudes towards career counseling. Ferrera reported that the general attitude towards career counseling was positive and that females valued career services more than male athletes. Self-stigma played a role in males’ lower positive attitude towards career counseling. Schwatken (2014) as well found that career indecision predicted attitudes toward career counseling. However, unlike students in the humanities and self-stigmas.

Al-Darmaki (2012) studied Arab students’ attitudes, self-esteem, and self-efficacy in relation to career counseling in UAE. Men had generally low attitudes towards career counseling and reported higher stigma levels on ATCCS. On the contrary, unlike students in life sciences, female students in the humanities reported low value for career counseling. More specifically, Arab university students tend to seek other ways other than professional help services due to the influence of culture, stigma, and family help patterns (Soliman, 1993). It is obvious that there is interplay among a number of factors that discourage college students from seeking counseling, particularly career counseling services, two of which are social and self-stigmas.

Location of services and facilities

The Center for Career Guidance at SQU is located in the Annex Administrative building along with other departments. It is located in the eastern part of campus and a little far from colleges such as Arts, Education, Sciences, and Commerce and Political sciences. SQU has a relatively large campus. The center used to be located in the Centers’ Complex that was next to two other colleges. According to the National Association for Colleges and Employers NACE (2014), an important standard for college career services centers is accessibility. As stated, “Career services’ programs, services, facilities, and resources, including technology, must be accessible to all students” (NACE, 2014, p. 33). This professional standard implies that the location of the career center in any college has to be within reach of all students so as to meet diverse student conditions. Furthermore, Herr, Rayman, and Garis (1993) indicated that it would not be acceptable that a career center be placed at the outskirts of campus nor feasible to merge career services with mental health clinics. Herr et al. (1993) strongly believed that career services are part of the educational institution and must be appreciated in order to achieve their mission. In a discussion about the emergence of career services centers and their significance, Herr et al. stressed the vital role career services have played in engendering change in students’ career development process. According to McGrath (2002), while career services centers used to be hidden and offer a limited number of services for university students, they have become more visible and accessible to students due to their vital role in student career success. McGrath reiterated the fact that career services have been growing in importance and universities should never overlook their significance. For the scope of this paper, it is vital to consider whether career services location might be a considerable barrier to seeking career services, particularly in large university campuses.

Marketing of career services and outreach strategies

Outreach and marketing strategies are crucial tools for the success of university career and counseling services. Rochlen, Blazina, and Raghunathan (2002) studied the influence of using brochures on students’ attitudes and stigma towards career counseling. Rochlen et al. found that males’ attitudes and self-stigma towards career counseling were positively influenced by career services brochures. Many students did not make use of career services due to marketing issues, possibly because career centers need to accommodate the needs of a wide range of specializations (McCorkle, Alexander, Reardon, and Kling, 2003). Thus, marketing strategies may not reach all students on campus and that part of the population remains disadvantaged. Moreover, Garver, Spralls III, and Divine (2008) concluded that using a variety of marketing techniques such as text messages and emails, technology-based job search skills workshops, credit courses, and one-to-one services are pivotal to accommodate diverse student popu-
lations. Grasgreen (2013) discussed that career services need to be decentralized in that they reach students at different locations on campus. In other words, centralized career services are among the reasons students are underserved. Finding ways to get more students into career services should be driven by meeting the needs of diverse student populations (Divine, 2008). In a nutshell, marketing services in ways that attract all student majors positively impacts students’ use of career services.

**Significance and hypotheses**

There is scarce research on the reasons SQU students seek career guidance and the possible factors preventing many of them from seeking services from the Center for Career Guidance. Al-Bahrani (2004) found that SQU students were not generally motivated to seek professional help due to religious and cultural variables in problem conceptualization and solving. Al-Ghanboosi (2013) examined students’ attrition rates and concluded that many students left SQU due to academic and social factors such that created an inability to meet the demands of a major, being uninterested in one’s major, or family circumstances. This study implies that career counseling services at SQU may have played a role in decreasing student attrition rates at SQU. Cueso (2005 as cited in Ludwikowski et al. 2009) and Schwatken (2014) underscored the importance of using career services in reducing student academic indecisiveness as well as attrition. McGarth (2002), McCorkle (2003), Amrein, (2013), Schwatken (2014) asserted that not many students made use of career services, which influenced students’ ability to be decided on a major and be more prepared for future job seeking.

The current study aimed to explore SQU students’ attitudes toward career guidance services provided by SQU’s Center for Career Guidance and the mediating role of stigma. Other related factors in relation to the center’s outreach strategies and location of the center on campus were investigated. Our hypothesis were that males had lower levels of value and higher levels of stigma attached to career services (Al-Darmaki, 2012, 2011a, Fabio and Bernaud, 2008). On the other hand, females have higher levels of value and lower levels of stigma attached to seeking career services at SQU. In addition, year at college would be an influential factor in the value and stigma levels. The older the student and more advanced in his/her studies, the higher value for and the lower stigma attached to career services are (Fabio & Bernaud, 2008). In addition, sciences students would have higher attitudes towards CS than humanities students (Al-Darmaki, 2003, 2011a, 2011b, & 2012).

Moreover, it was hypothesized that location and outreach strategies discouraged SQU students from seeking help from the Center for Career Guidance. Results of this paper could be informative and may help in revisiting strategies implemented to get more clients/students make use of career guidance services at SQU. Learning about students’ perceptions and attitudes would help identify issues involved and clarify any ambiguities preventing from utmost use of the center’s career services.

**Method**

**Participants**

The study was conducted at SQU, the largest university in Oman with a total enrollment of about 15,000 full time undergraduate and graduate students. 134 SQU full-time undergraduate students (N=54; 40% are males and N=80; 60% are females) with 56 students from sciences colleges and 78 from humanities participated in the study. Participants mostly ranged between second to fourth year students. The sample age ranged between 18 to 23 years old. All participants were national Omani students. Courses were identified by contacting the instructors in advance so as to ensure willingness and need for scale translation into Arabic.

**Instrument**

The instrument was used to answer the main study question. Rochlen’s et al. (1999) Attitudes toward Career Counseling Services (ATCCS) was used to investigate students’ attitudes and stigma towards career services. ATCCS is a 16-item scale with two subscales: items 1-8 for value of career counseling (e.g., “Career counseling is a valuable resource in making a career choice”) and items 9-16 for stigma toward career counseling (e.g., “I would be too embarrassed to ever schedule an appointment with a career counselor”). The scale is a 4-point-type Likert scale where
The subscales can be referred to as VCC = value of career counseling, and SCC = stigma toward career counseling. Low scores on VCC mean low value for career counseling and high scores on SCC indicate high stigma towards career counseling. The ATCCS was used by several researchers on different cultural university populations such as Rochlen et al. (1999), Rochlen and O’Brian (2002), Fabio and Bernaud (2008), Al-Darmaki (2012), and Nam, and Park (2015). The validity of the scale is well-established due to its wide use in the career counseling literature. Rochlen et al. (1999) reported 0.85 as reliability for value, and 0.80 for stigma, with a total 0.80 for both subscales. Nam, and Park (2015) reported high construct validity for ATCCS and a reliability level (Cronbach’s alpha) 0.87. Fabio and Bernaud (2008) reported α = .82 for value and α = .75 for the stigma scale. In a translated version to Arabic, Al Darmaki (2012) reported an α = .80 and an α = .78 for the value and stigma subscales, respectively. Overall, a number of studies support the validity and reliability of the ATCCS. To the author’s knowledge, this scale has never been applied to investigate Omani students’ attitudes towards career counseling services. Due to unavailability of the translated version by Al-Darmaki (2012), ATCCS was translated into Arabic by the researcher and was then translated back to English by another bilingual person to control for language discrepancies. No significant differences were found when the back translation was compared to the original scale. Some statements in relation to the center’s location, outreach and marketing services were separately investigated along with ATCCS to explore any external factors. Permission to use the scale was obtained and instructions provided for taking the scale were included in the instruction part of the scale.

**Procedure**

Students’ responses were collected through classroom visits. The instrument was distributed to students psychology courses at Sultan Qaboos University from summer of 2015 to fall of 2016. This was due to moderate response pool when using online surveys sent through the email. Thus, coordination with the professors was arranged in advance to allocate about the first 15 minutes of class time to fill the ATCCS scale and the separately added qualitative statements. Each student received a packet containing a cover sheet (describing the research, confidentiality, and rights) and a paper and pencil instrument. Careful consideration was followed during recruitment so that respondents felt emotionally and academically safe, all the while using a reliable instrument to measure students’ attitudes towards career counseling services. The investigator spent a few minutes to introduce the research and to familiarize participants with the scale. Participants were requested to candidly respond to all statements regarding career services at SQU even if they lacked information about some questions. Student participation was voluntary and they were given the choice of not participating if they wished. After taking the instrument, participants were debriefed about the use of the results, their use for students and university, and information about contacting the investigator to learn about the final findings.

**Results**

**Quantitative Results**

The reliability scores of the ATCCS scale were obtained. The value scale had an alpha internal consistency of .825, and the Stigma subscale scored had an alpha of .701. Levene’s test for equality of variances showed that the sample was homogenous across the value, stigma, and overall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations (Value, Stigma, &amp; Overall)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Value</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-.175 *, .626 **</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
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<tr>
<td>.657 **</td>
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Table 1 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients for the Value, Stigma, and overall Mean. Results show that both subscales (value and stigma) had a significant negative relationship (r = -.175, p < .05). Results indicated that responses in one scale can be predictive of the other subscale. For example, high scores in the value subscale indicated low scores across the stigma subscale. On the contrary, low scores across the stigma scale meant high scores across the value scale. This shows that stigma may be attached to career help seeking if the value for career services was low. In other words, predicting the level of value attached to career help seeking could be achieved by learning about the level of stigma towards career counseling. Moreover, it is important to
note that both scales had a positive significant relationship with the overall score of the scale (α = .000). This finding provides further support to previous literature that reported high internal consistency scores for the ATCCS.

Table 2 shows the value of career services among males and females at SQU. One-Way ANOVA demonstrated relatively high mean scores on the value scale for both males and females. In fact, across most value statements, means were higher the test value (M=2), which indicated no gender difference (t = - .263, p > .10) for the value of career guidance services at SQU. This is counter to the study’s original hypothesis where females were expected to have higher value and lower stigma towards career services. The hypothesis was rejected as no gender difference was found. These results were inconsistent with similar studies such as Rochlen et al. (1999) and Al-Rowaie (2001) who found that Kuwaiti female university students were more willing to seek career services than males. Moreover, the current results were counter to Al-Darmaki (2012) who found that Emirati female students in humanities colleges had low value for career services. However, the current findings are consistent with Blondeau and Awad (2017) who found no significant sex differences in help seeking behaviors. They reported “Our findings indicate that the social stigma against seeking help may be reduced in male-oriented domains for males” (p. 183).

As for the stigma subscale, the reported mean across both genders was lower than the test value (M=2, t ≥ .717, p > .05). The hypothesis was that males had higher levels of stigma attached to seeking career services at SQU than females. The hypothesis was rejected since both males (M=1.92) and females (M=1.85) scored low levels of stigma attached to career services. This finding was counter to Al-Busaidi (2010) who concluded that Omani female patients tended to avoid talking about their personal issues with physicians. This finding was also counter to Fabio and Bernaud (2008) and Al-Darmaki (2012) who reported gender differences in stigma level. With regards to career services, it appears that both genders in Oman may be willing to seek career help when provided or needed, possibly due to previous positive exposure to career guidance at schools (Bernaud & Bideault, 2005).

Table 3 shows results comparing the effect of major (science versus humanities) on attitudes towards career help seeking. Across the value subscale, no academic major difference was reported, with M=3.29 for sciences and M=3.20 for humanities (p > .05). Similarly, both sciences and humanities students had a relatively low stigma scores (Sciences M=1.95, SD=.49 & Humanities M=1.88, SD=.50, p > .05). Across both subscales, no significant difference was found in favor of hard sciences majors as in Al-Darmaki (2012).

### Table 2

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<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
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### Table 3

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The overall level of value for CS was higher than the average test score, test value = 2. Thus, the hypothesis that humanitarians having lower attitudes towards help seeking than sciences (Al-Darmaki, 2012) does not seem to be true among the study sample. The hypothesis that sciences students have higher attitudes than humanitarians is rejected as no significant difference was found (p > .05). The case may not be the same in Oman as SQU students are basically high achievers and goal oriented, which was found to be positively related to attitudes towards help seeking (Mcllveen, Becarria, Burton, 2013).

Table 4 shows the effect of year at college on value and stigma towards career services. Students at year two were compared with students at year 4 in college. The hypothesis was that as students progress at college, they gain more desire for career services, have higher value than beginning students, and have lower stigma than newer students at SQU. However, One Way ANOVA examining year at college, value, stigma, and overall showed no significant difference in levels of stigma and value with regards to year at college. The mean M= 3.21 (SD= .63, p >= .05) for second year students and M= 3.26 (std. = .44, p > .05) for 4th year students. This is counter to the original hypothesis, thus, the hypothesis that year at college influenced value for career services was rejected. As for the stigma, no significant influence for year at college on stigma level. Both second year students (M= 1.9, p > .05) and fourth year students (M= 1.87, p=.787) showed low levels of stigma towards seeking help from career guidance center. The hypothesis was that stigma would be higher with newer students and lower with higher level students (Fabio and Bernaud, 2008). Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected as year at college did not, in fact, influence students’ level of stigma.

Qualitative Results

In addition to the ATCCS (Rochlen, et al. 1999) scale, three open ended questions were asked in relation to accessibility of location and marketing of services across campus. Analysis of the themes of responses could explain few reasons behind students’ responses in the ATCCS scale. When asked about the accessibility of the center and the propriety of the location, only a few students answered it was easy to reach. In fact, most responses explained that the center was located far away from most students and that it was not accessible by a lot of students on campus. Participants explained that the need for transportation and hot weather significantly discouraged students from seeking career services for the Center for Career Guidance. Surprisingly, a number of participants indicated ignorance about the location of the center or that they knew little about its services (Crisan, Pavelea, and Ghimbilut, 2014). This finding goes hand in hand with Al-Bahrami (2004) who found that students confused the role of the Center for Career guidance at SQU. As Al-Bahrami reported, students indicated several roles for the center such as social work, resolution of family issues, and help in academic major change for students in probation. This might indicate the misconception between the student and the center and how this has created role confusion. While participants valued career services and indicated low stigma levels, they indicated need for career services. Many participants explained that the center’s location was far away from students and from where most students do their activities. These results are in line with a number of studies such as McGrath (2002) and NACE (2014) professional standards for university career centers. The current literature supports the fact that career services must be close to students’ location of activities in order to reach most students. McGrath explained that university career services need to
reach out for students in order that centers be as beneficial as possible to most students on campus.

Participants were also asked about the center’s marketing and outreach strategies through emails, social media, posters, etc. The majority of the responses explained that the center was not as active in using social media to reach students, except for using emails. A number of participants wished that the career guidance center relied on social media as a powerful tool to reach the maximum number of students on campus. Some participants explained that using emails was not enough as many students did not actually check their emails on a regular basis. McGrath (2002) explained that social media was considered an effective tool to get the message across to as many university students as desired.

Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate student attitudes toward career services at Sultan Qaboos University while looking at gender differences and possible reasons explaining student responses. Using the ATCCS scale for Rochlen et al. (1999), results of the current study clearly indicated a relatively high value for career services. The findings are counter to Al-Rowaie (2001), Fabio and Bernaud (2008) and Al-Darmaki (2012) who found that help seeking processes and attitudes were generally negative among Emirati university students. Unlike UAE university, SQU is a very selective institution whose students are generally high achievers. It was found that students with high levels of academic achievement had more interest in career help seeking as it is a professional way of obtaining career information (McIlveen, Beccaria, Burton, 2013). This could also be explained in light of previous students’ experience with career counseling at high school (Bernaud and Bideault, 2005). Since career guidance started in Oman schools about a decade ago, most of the participants may have had experience with career guidance in one way or another. Participants could have benefited from career services at schools and possibly made use of the same services at university. The results also indicated no gender difference in value for career services. This was counter to Rochlen et al (1999), Fabio and Bernaud (2008), Al-Darmaki (2012) who reported a gender difference towards value for career services in favor of hard sciences female students. This result could be interpreted in a number of ways. First, it might be due to the nature of the job market between Oman and UAE. Al-Harthi (2011) indicated that Omani students and their families place a great value on landing a job post-graduation, which possibly made Omani students place high value for career help seeking. Second, it could be that psychological help seeking may not have the same level of stigma as career counseling (Herr, Rayman, and Garis, 1993). Thus, SQU male students may have positive attitudes towards career services by differentiating between stigma towards psychological help (Al-Bahrani, 2004) and career guidance services. While male students significantly valued career services, possible cultural and religious alternatives might be considered when being in a career related problem (Al-Bahrani, 2004). While it should be noted that many of the current findings are counter to some of the previous literature, it should not be dismissed that greater awareness about the importance of career help seeking might be growing due to career guidance movement in Oman.

The current study did not indicate a significant difference in ATCCS scores between students in their first two years and students in their last two years. It was expected that as students get closer to graduation, they get more information about the career center’s activities (Crisan, Pavelea, and Ghimbulut, 2014). The current findings did not indicate a difference between levels of value and stigma in relation to year at college. It is possible that many students at SQU become concerned with their career as early as they enter university. This idea was supported by Goetsch, Jordan, Jung, Lampman, Nobbs, and Ruiz (2010) who found that the earlier college students get interested in their careers, the more positive attitudes they develop towards career help seeking.

While there was no clear data about the number of students benefiting from career services at SQU, answers to the open ended questions indicated that the majority of the sample did not seek career help, regardless of the fact that they highly appreciated such a service (Crisan, Pavelea, and Ghimbulut, 2014). It might be that students are using other help resources to resolve their career concerns such as academic advising, reading from the web, social media
Drawing a link between the results of value scale with the qualitative items asked in a separate section, some explanations could be made. First, most participants explained that the current location of the career services was far away from most student activities. Participants claimed that heat and transportation made the task even more difficult should a student want to visit the career guidance center. Many of them indicated unwillingness to visit the center for the previous reasons. It is interesting to find such a discrepancy between students' value for career services and willingness to visit the center. McGrath (2002) explained that the career services location could be a motivating or a de-motivating reason for students to seek career services. As explained earlier, the current location of the Center for Career Guidance at SQU is quite far from student activity center and classes. With the high value for career services indicated by the ATCCS, students could be more willing to see a career staff if the center was located close to students' activities. Second, many participants explained that they did not know where the center was located at and that the center was not active in communicating with student population. While this claim needs to be validated, research supports the effectiveness of social media in reaching diverse student populations (McGrath, 2002; and Crisan, Pavelea, and Ghimbulut, 2014). Many professional university career services rely on social media in reaching the maximum number of student populations. It seems that if the center for career guidance was more active in promoting services and workshops through social media, student would know a lot more about the usefulness of the center for students. In such a digital era, social media is at the core of marketing and communication strategies for a lot of organizations. A career center serves clients the same as a company serves customers. There needs to be marketing of events, workshops, and services through all possible media channels to maximize reach out to the target population.

Limitations

The current study faced a number of challenges and limitations. First, the limited response pool negatively affected recruitment process. The number of respondents (134) was less than the least desired, which was partly related to difficulty of accessing students in other colleges such as Medicine, Science, and Engineering. Second, the sample was not representative of all SQU population as the number might be disproportionate in comparison to the total SQU student number. Hence, careful interpretation of results should be considered. Results may be more generalizable on the study sample but may yield different results if a larger sample was recruited. Third, the researcher had to translate the original copy of the ATCCS to Arabic since a number of students did not read English very well. The translated version in Al-Darmaki (2012) could not be accessed for extraneous factors. This process took some time to complete so as to ensure accuracy, and it may have affected the overall reliability of the original scale, though subscales showed high reliability scores.

Implications for practice

The current findings have a number of implications for practice. First, career services staff may have an idea now about the level of student willingness to seek career services at Sultan Qaboos University and the level of stigma attached to CS. Moreover, CS staff are informed that regardless of the gender, year at college, or age, the majority of students seem to need more attention from CS as described in the qualitative part of the study. Students need to be more aware of the center’s specific periodical and ongoing services. Students specifically indicated that social media could be better utilized to reach the target population. In addition, the majority of the students did not believe that the location of the center was convenient. Thus, the CS center may need to conduct more services where most students are located. For this purpose, the decentralized model of CS is recommended as it could eliminate many of the barriers to seek help (Herr, Rayman, and Garis, 1993). In fact, learning the general attitude to CS may not be enough unless students are really benefiting from the services. Another implication could be that career help seeking mentality needs to be con-
tinually assessed by respective university de-
partments as this might help in developing
plans to improve the services.

Recommendations

The current study might be the first of its kind in the Omani context. To the investigator’s
knowledge, attitudes toward career counseling
services were not investigated in the Oma-
ni context. Therefore, further research is re-
commended, particularly on external factors
such as the role of culture on students’ lack of
career help seeking. Furthermore, related
studies involving larger samples of the univer-
sity student population may need to be con-
ducted in order to yield more accurate results,
such as including students from science, medi-
cine, and business colleges. Research should
continue exploring the field of career develop-
ment in Oman as literature about career develop-
ment is quite scarce.

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Student Attitudes toward Career Counseling Services at Sultan Qaboos University
Mahmoud S. Alma’wali
Vol.11 Issue 4, 2017


The Impact of Small Group Instruction on Preschool Literacy Skills

Majedah Abu Al Rub*  
Yarmouk University, Jordan

Abstract: This study focused on 17 preschool students in a northern Jordan city. Preschoolers were taught specific literacy skills in a small group instructional setting. The students’ skill level was assessed at the beginning and middle of the school year. The researcher’s goal was to determine if teaching literacy skills in a small group setting would improve the skill level of the preschool students. Results showed that using small groups was an effective way to increase preschool students’ literacy skill levels.

Keywords: Small group instruction, preschool literacy skills, Curriculum, preschool students.

Keywords: *أثر تدريس المجموعات التعاونية الصغرى على مهارات القراءة والكتابة لطلبة ما قبل المدرسة
ماجدة أبو الرب*  
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Early childhood educators seek to introduce and build their students’ literacy skills. Some preschool-aged children have already been exposed to a variety of literacy skills. For example, they may come from homes where parents read to them daily, point out letter and sound connections, and have already begun to learn to write their own names. However, many children do not come from these print-rich backgrounds and school is their first experience with books, letters and writing. A preschool teacher’s job is to help all the children make gains in their literacy knowledge, despite their diverse starting points.

A young child needs many different literacy skills to begin building a foundation for literacy success. Three of these specific skills are letter-sound recognition, letter formation, and book skills. According to an online report issued by the National Reading Panel (2000 as cited in Kamps et al., 2008), effective reading instruction includes teaching children to break apart and manipulate the sounds in words (phonemic awareness), teaching that these sounds are represented by letters of the alphabet which can then be blended together to form words (phonics), having them practice what they have learned by reading aloud with guidance and feedback (guided oral reading), and applying reading comprehension strategies to guide and improve reading comprehension. These skills can be taught in small classrooms or in large group settings.

This study’s purpose was to examine the impact of teaching these skills in small group settings. This study assumed that small groups can be highly beneficial to children. Small groups give the teacher a closer look at what each child may be struggling with and the skills the children have already begun to develop. This study focused on the three literacy skills mentioned in the previous paragraph to narrow the large scope of research in this area.

The researcher first performed a baseline (Sept) assessment with students to determine their skill levels in these three literacy skills. This data guided instruction planning for the small group. Then, the teacher worked with students in small groups for several weeks and then performed a second (March) assessment. The importance of this study stems from providing insight into the impact of small group instruction on preschool literacy skills.

Data showing the benefits of small group instruction is useful to designing preschool literacy programs in Jordan. This research aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How does small group instruction impact preschool literacy skills?
2. How does small group instruction look like in a preschool classroom?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference on group scores when comparing between baseline and March assessments for each of the three skills after intervention (small group)?

Literature Review

Early childhood educators use many strategies to teach literacy skills to their students. Skills are introduced in large group meetings and reinforced during play in centers. The idea of teaching skills such as hand writing, letter recognition, and book skills in small group settings has recently been added to the preschool curriculum. Research shows that the more exposure to literacy a child has at a young age, the more successful the student will be in later years. Small groups can be an essential part of teaching young children literacy skills. The remainder of this section reviews relevant existing literature on literacy skills and small group instruction.

Literacy Skills

Preschool literacy skills include being able to name letters, form letters and make letter-sound connections. According to Teaching Strategies, Inc. (2010a, 2010b), literacy development in the early years is critical for later success. The level to which a child progresses in reading and writing is one of the best predictors of whether the child will function competently in school and in life.

Piasta and Wagner (2010) found that a primary objective of preschool instruction and intervention is facilitating the development of alphabet knowledge, which is a hallmark of early literacy (p. 8). Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) defined alphabet knowledge as children’s familiarity with letter forms, names, and corresponding sounds, as measured by recognition, production, and writing tasks. Heroman and Jones (2004) said that knowledge of letters and how they work is an important component of literacy, and it in-
volves much more than reciting the ABC song or recognizing individual letters. Readers must understand that a letter is a symbol that represents one or more sound. The authors added, “The idea that written spellings correspond to spoken words is called the alphabetic principle. Children’s understanding of the alphabetic principle is a predictor of future reading success” (p. 28). Adams, (1990) and Steven and Newman (1986, p.30 as sited in Heroman and Jones 2004), stating that a pre-reader’s alphabet knowledge is one of the single best predictors of eventual reading achievement.

The National Reading Panel (2004, 2008) stated that phonological sensitivity is also a strong predictor of later reading, writing, and spelling ability. Kamps et al. (2008) found that phonemic awareness skills should be emphasized to strengthen the oral/written language connection (p. 105). After examining 100,000 students on how students learn to read, the National Reading Panel (2000) issued an online report. The panel concluded the following definition of early reading instruction and intervention:

“Effective reading instruction includes teaching children to break apart and manipulate the sounds in words (phonemic awareness), teaching them that these sounds are represented by letters of the alphabet which can then be blended together to form words (phonics), having them practice what they have learned by reading aloud with guidance and feedback (guided oral reading), and applying reading comprehensions strategies to guide and improve reading comprehension.” (p. 107)

Heroman and Jones (2004), quoting Adams (1990), added, “Familiarity of the letters of the alphabet and awareness of the speech sounds, or phonemes, to which they correspond, are strong predictors of the ease or difficulty with which a child learns to read” (p. 25). Further, they said that phonological awareness, also referred to as phonological sensitivity, is the act of hearing and understanding different sounds and patterns of spoken language. This research shows that alphabet knowledge and phonemic awareness are important indicators for a child to be a successful student. These studies show that skills should be introduced to preschool age children using specific strategies to help the children retain the information they are learning.

Small Groups

Small group instruction is becoming a more widely used way of teaching specific skills to preschool children. According to Katz (1999), the data on children’s learning suggests that preschool and kindergarten experiences require an intellectually oriented approach in which children interact in small groups as they work together on projects that help them make increasing sense of their own experience. Katz added that the younger the children are, the greater the variety of teaching methods there should be, because the younger the children, the less likely they are to have been socialized into a standard way of responding to their social environment (p. 5).

Preschool teachers use a wide variety of teaching methods to engage their students on a daily basis. For example, large group instruction could be used to review everyday skills such as counting and letter identification. Large groups are also used to introduce a skill, for example letter formation, and then small group time is used to practice the skill, for example actually writing the letter.

Dodge, Colker, and Heroman (2002) said, “The purpose of small group time is to present activities briefly to a few children” (p. 86). Following this idea with the above example, small group time could be short and the children would practice writing the letter a few times. The teacher would watch the children form the letters and make any notes on their progress. Dodge Colker, and Heroman state: “the size of the group depends on the age and the individual needs of the child. Three-year-olds will benefit more from informal small-group settings of two to four children. A small group for older preschoolers can be three to six children” (p. 86). When speaking of small groups Katz says that they should include constructions and dramatic play as well as a variety of early literacy and numeracy activities that emerge from the work of the investigation and the tasks of summarizing findings and sharing the experiences of the work accomplished. Kamps et al. (2008) also say that small bits of information are introduced in each lesson. Concepts are repeatedly reviewed in different contexts and modalities to strengthen the brain’s pathways in depositing and recalling information, which enhances mastery.
Prior research also indicated that smaller group sizes are an important contributing factor to the success of reading interventions (Kamps et al., 2008). Kamps et al. (2008) found that teachers and school staff were able to successfully provide small group interventions for the students. This finding suggests that the time to successfully implement the use of small group instruction into the daily schedule is possible. Kamps et al. (2008) also suggested that small groups should take less than ten minutes and do not always have to be the same lesson for each group. Children do not work without direct teacher intervention in small group work (Hastings and Chantrey-Wood, 2002). Gillies’ studies (2003a, 2003b) showed that structured group work by teachers has more collaboration among students and they use higher thinking skills than groups with unstructured work. This study emphasized that the structure of tasks is more important than working well together.

**Method**

The participants in this study attended a preschool center in a northern Jordan city of Irbed. The study sample consisted of 17 preschool students who were 4 or 5 years old. These students attended preschool for 6 hours each day. Each day, the children participated in large group activities, snack time, small group activities, and free choice time. The daily small group activities were the focus of this research study. The activities in this study were normal classroom activities that the children were all used to participating.

The primary instrument that was used in this study was the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5. According to Colker et al. (2002), “The Developmental Continuum lays out the progression of development in each developmental area. It is made up of goals and objectives” (p. 42). Specifically, this study used the Language Development area of the Developmental Continuum. The goals and objectives in this area were further separated into two sections. The two sections were listening and speaking, and reading and writing. Skills from both areas were assessed during this research project. Each objective on the Developmental Continuum has three forerunners and three steps. Colker et al. (2002) said, “Because children develop at very different rates, these boxes do not represent a specific age; rather they show the sequence of achieving each objective” (p. 43). According to their continuum, step one (S1) represents the beginning level, the second step (S2) indicates the next level in reaching the objective and the third step (S3) represents the highest level of skill development. Forerunner skills are used for children who are not developing at the typical preschool pace.

For this study, students were assessed two times. The baseline (September) assessment occurred at the beginning of the school year to determine the developmental levels of the children in the class. This assessment occurred individually with the researcher and consisted of asking them (“Let’s look at these letters. Can you tell me any of them?”). Based on their answers, each student was placed on one of the levels from the criteria (either forerunner or one of the three steps). The data from this assessment determined the needs of students individually and as a whole group. During mid-year, a second (March) assessment took place. The children again were placed on the Developmental Continuum according to the skills the researcher observed in the classroom. In all, the data that determined where the children were placed on the Developmental Continuum was a combination of classroom observation and small group activities.

Two other instruments were used to gather data in this study. One was the small group focus sheet and the other was anecdotal notes. The small group focus sheet was used during each small group activity. On the sheet, the researcher listed what she was looking for during the small group and made comments on the children’s performance as well as what may need to be worked on further. Also, she used this documentation when determining what lessons to teach, as well as when determining if specific students need more one-on-one work to help improve skills. Anecdotal notes were gathered during large group and free choice activities. The researcher utilized different methods of collecting data through observation and informal ways of recording observations such as jotting down a quick observation on post-it notes.

**Research Questions**

- How does small group instruction impact preschool literacy skills?
• How does small group instruction look like in a preschool classroom?
• Is there a statistically significant difference on group scores when comparing between baseline and March assessments for each of the three skills after intervention (small group)?

Definition of Terms
Small Group Instruction: teaching a concept or skill with a selected group of children.

Creative Curriculum: a research-based developmentally-appropriate practice for teachers of preschool age children.

Baseline (Sept) Assessment: the first assessment of the school year, the purpose is to determine what skills the children enter school knowing.

March Assessment: the second assessment in the middle of the school year, the purpose is to determine what skills the children improved and achieved.

Anecdotal Notes: Quick notes which can be kept to monitor a child’s progress or growth over time.

Results
The first research question dealt with determining the extent to which small group instruction impacted preschool literacy skills. To measure this, the researcher used the students’ scores from the baseline data and assessments conducted after the study’s intervention. Three objectives were assessed from the creative curriculum continuum. The researcher compared the scores of each of the objectives from baseline data to the post-intervention assessment. The scores each child could receive, in order of progression, were: Forerunner 1, Forerunner 2, Forerunner 3, Step 1, Step 2, and Step 3. The assessment was a continuum meant to show growth over time. Figures 1, 2 and 3 show the class’s performance during both the baseline and post-intervention assessments. The three objectives are as follows:

Objective 45: demonstrates understanding of print concepts. This Objective focuses on skills such as knowing that print carries a message (Step 1) and knows each spoken word can be written down and read (Step 3).

Objective 46: demonstrates knowledge of the alphabet. This Objective focuses on skills such as recognizing and identifying a few letters by name (Step 1) and Beginning to make letter-sound connections (Step 3). Objective 48: comprehends and interprets meaning from books and other texts. This Objective focuses on skills such as imitating the act of reading in play (Step 1) and retelling a story including many details and draws connections between story events (Step 3).

Figure 1: Assessment results for objective 45: “Students’ ability to demonstrate understanding of print concepts.”

Figure 1 shows that 9% of students were at forerunner 3 (F3) on the baseline assessment which they recognize logos and pictures e.g., identify McDonald’s logo; see picture label of beads on shelf and say beads go here and none of the students were at forerunner levels after the intervention. 64% of students were at Step 1 (S1) on the baseline assessment and 55% of the students were at S1 after the intervention which they know that print carries the message e.g., point to printed label on shelf and say, “Cars go here”; looking at the name the teacher has written on another child’s drawing, says, “Whose is this?” 18% of the students were at S2 on the baseline assessment and 36% were at the same step on the March assessment which they know that print carries the message e.g., point to printed label on shelf and say, “Cars go here”; looking at the name the teacher has written on another child’s drawing, says, “Whose is this?” 18% of the students were at S2 on the baseline assessment and 36% were at the same step on the March assessment which they know that print carries the message e.g., point to printed label on shelf and say, “Cars go here”; looking at the name the teacher has written on another child’s drawing, says, “Whose is this?”
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ment showed the same 9% were at Step 3, which indicated that children know each spoken word can be written down and read e.g., touch a written word for every spoken word in a story; looking at a menu asks, “Which word says pancakes?” no additional students had moved forward to Step 3 after the intervention.

Figure 2: Assessment results for objective 46 “students’ ability to demonstrate knowledge of the alphabet”

Figure 2 shows that 45% of the students were at Forerunner 3 on the baseline assessment which indicates that they match two letters that are alike e.g., child matches letter M to another letter M and none of them were at F3 on the second assessment, this shows improvement. Eighteen percent of students were at Step 1 on the Baseline Assessment, while 45% of students were at Step 1 on the second assessment which indicates that they recognize and identify a few letters by name e.g., point to a cereal box and say, “That’s C like in my name”.

Twenty-seven percent of students were at Step 2 on the Baseline, while 17% were at Step 2 on the second assessment which indicates that they recognize and name many letters e.g., use alphabet stamps and name the letters – “D, T, M. Nine percent of students were at Step 3 on the baseline assessment and 36% of students were at this level on the second assessment which indicates that they could on S3 begin to make letter-sound connections e.g., write a big M and say, “This is for Mommy. These results show considerable improvement after the intervention.

Figure 3: Assessment results for objective 48 “students’ ability to comprehend and interprets meaning from books and other texts”

Figure 3 shows that 28% of the students were at Forerunner 3 in the baseline assessment, while 19% were at the same level in the second assessment which indicates that they relate story to self and share information e.g., after hearing a story about new shoes, says, “new shoes,” and points to own shoes. At the baseline assessment, 55% of the students were at Step 1, while 18% were at the same level in the second assessment which they initiate act of reading n play e.g., hold up book and pretend to read to a baby doll; take out phonebook in dramatic play area to make a phone call. Step 2 showed the most difference between the two assessments as 9% were at Step 2 on the baseline assessment but that number jumped to 55% on the second assessment. This result indicates considerable improvement on comparing and predicting story events; acting out main events of a familiar story e.g., compares own feelings about baby brother to those of character; re-enacts Three Billy Goats Gruff. The same students were at Step 3 after both the baseline and second assessment, 9% which indicates that they retell a story including many details and draw connections between story events.
The second research question dealt with examining how small group instruction looks like in a preschool classroom. The researcher started the project with 5 children in the small groups but ended up working with only 4 children at a time. Small group was based on instructional objectives in the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum.

The class was divided into groups of 4 and each group had a task. While one group was working with the researcher, the other groups would be working on a specific skill such as problem solving or fine motor work. Each group session took between five and ten minutes then the groups would rotate. During the small groups sessions the researcher kept track of the student’s performance on the Small Group Focus Sheet. This sheet had the goal, materials needed, children’s names and 2 or 3 things to focus on within each lesson.

For group work to be productive and effective, children make sure that all members in the group understand the learning task, can share actively, and work hard for the success of their group. Students working in groups would develop some social skills such as how to request help and how to provide help to their peers. In order to achieve the goal, the researcher and the teachers taught them how to engage in meaningful conversations about the topic or task and how to face and resolve conflicts. In addition, the researcher emphasized to teachers how to set up, promote, and sustain such group work, how to encourage the group’s accountability for being on task, and when and how to intervene when problems arise (Gillies & Ashman, 2004).

**Discussion**

This study focused on the effect of small group instruction on preschool literacy skills and whether using small group instruction would improve the literacy skills of preschool students. Figure 1 showed results from the before and after assessments regarding objective 45, which focused on children’s understanding of print concepts. The children were asked to show the researcher the front and back of the book and then they were asked where to start reading the book. During the baseline assessment, many children pointed to the picture on the page rather than the text, but during the second assessment more of them began to point to the text on the page. The researcher then told the children that she would read the words and they were to put their finger on the text and follow along. She also asked children questions about the book and helped them use the pictures on the page to answer questions. The results showed that many of the children improved their understanding of print concepts from the first to the second assessment. The number of students in Step Two or Three rose from 27% to 45% after the intervention.

Figure 2 showed the results from the two assessments in regarding objective 46, which focused on the children knowledge of the alphabet. The researcher introduced letters of the alphabet during large group time and then in small groups, students were asked to identify the letter, write it and talk about its sound. The researcher also played games with the children where they had to sort pictures based on the first letter sound. For example, a picture of cat would go with the letter c. In the baseline assessment, 36% of students were at Step 2 and 3 on the Developmental Continuum, that number increased to 53% on the second assessment.

Figure 3 showed the results of objective 48, which focused on how the child comprehended and interpreted meaning from books and other texts. This is related to the child’s to recall information from a story and even retell the story by acting it out or using props to show the sequence of events that took place during the story. In large group, the researcher read the story to the whole class and in small groups they used the felt board and pieces of felt that represent characters in the story to

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The third question dealt with examining if there was a statistically significant difference on mean scores after intervention. Results showed that there was a statistically significant difference on group scores when comparing between baseline and March assessments for each of the three skills after intervention (small group) (see table 1).
retell the story. The students also drew pictures of the events of a story. The children worked together to get the sequencing right or to assign who gets what part of the story. In the baseline assessment, 18% of students were at Step 2 or 3, while in the second assessment 64% of students were at these steps. This shows an improvement of 46% after the intervention.

According to the results of this study, a positive impact was found from using this small group instruction intervention to improve preschool literacy skills. This result coincides with Kamps et al. (2008) when they stated, “Concepts are repeatedly reviewed in different contexts and modalities to strengthen the brain’s pathways in depositing and recalling information, which enhances mastery” (p. 105). This study’s results also agree with Katz (1999), who stated, “the data on children’s learning suggest that preschool and kindergarten experiences require an intellectually oriented approach in which children interact in small groups as they work together on projects that help them make increasing sense of their own experiences” (p. 5). The findings from this study revealed that students in small groups in the classroom learned significantly in regards to language skills more than students who were not instructed in small groups. This is supported by Lou’s et al. (1996) study which determined that small group instruction was most effective when groups consisted of 3 to 4 students, and the intervention was more effective.

This study reinforces the importance of preschool curriculum and demonstrates that using small groups can improve the literacy skills of preschool students. Although research studies on this topic were very limited when it came to preschool-aged students, many curricula books suggest teaching skills and concepts in small groups is a beneficial way to improve skills. Further research in this area based on preschool children would be beneficial to early childhood educators. Extending this concept by using small group instruction in other domains to improve math and social emotional skills is also suggested for further research.

References


Inclusion of an Autistic Child in Kindergarten Facility: A Case Study

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the effects of inclusion of an autistic child, at entrance age of four years and seven months, into the Child Care Center of the Sultan Qaboos University. The study was designed to specifically answer: (1) Which domains of the ASDA scale did ‘Ahmad’ show notable improvement? (2) Which areas of the academic program did ‘Ahmad’ show notable improvement? The program at the Center is a bilingual mainstream program in Arabic and English. It is a highly structured and individualized program which covers all of the developmental domains. It caters for two groups of mixed age children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The study used the Arabic Scale for Detecting Autism – ASDA (Al Qaryouti & Ababneh, 2006) along with an entrance test and parent interview. The result of this assessment indicated that the subject of this study had autism. After six months, a further application of the scale showed that significant improvement had occurred, particularly in the communication and social interaction domains. Concurrently, the subject made marked progress in his academic studies, notably in the areas of math and language. A further application of the scale a year after the second indicated that the lack of severity of symptoms no longer warranted the autistic label. Inclusion of autistic children in a normal setting can have a positive impact on both social behavior and academic skills, if a well-structured program and a controlled learning environment in the setting of adequately training teachers is applied.

Keywords: Autistic, kindergarten, case study, inclusion.
Autism is a complex neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain. It is a pervasive developmental disorder which is characterized by impairment in communication, both verbal and nonverbal, and deficient social interaction, causing significant functional impairment and having an adverse effect on the child’s educational performance. (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 35). Children with autism display a restricted repertoire of activities and interests and often engage in repetitive and stereotypical patterns of behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Those with autism have difficulty adapting to new situations (Ministry of Education, 2000) and have trouble understanding the feelings of others (Griffin Roberts, 2008). Some features of autistic behavior that are easily recognizable and indicative of a need for further investigation when observed in a child are the following:

- Inattention
- Lack of eye contact
- Dislike of physical touch
- Lack of social skills
- Resistance to change
- Hand flapping, spinning or rocking or walking on toes
- Attachment to objects
- Delayed, or lack of, appropriate language development
- Stereotypical language usage or simple repetition of phrases with no apparent meaning.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), the following diagnostic criteria are indicative of the presence of autism spectrum disorder in an individual.

**A. Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts**, as manifested by the following, currently or by history (examples are illustrative, not exhaustive, see text):

1. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, ranging, for example, from abnormal social approach and failure of normal back-and-forth conversation; to reduced sharing of interests, emotions, or affect; to failure to initiate or respond to social interactions.

2. Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, ranging, for example, from poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication; to abnormalities in eye contact and body language or deficits in understanding and use of gestures; to a total lack of facial expressions and nonverbal communication.

3. Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships, ranging, for example, from difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts; to difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends; to absence of interest in peers.

**B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities**, as manifested by at least two of the following, currently or by history (examples are illustrative, not exhaustive; see text):

1. Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech (e.g., simple motor stereotypies, lining up toys or flipping objects, echolalia, idiosyncratic phrases).

2. Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns or verbal nonverbal behavior (e.g., extreme distress at small changes, difficulties with transitions, rigid thinking patterns, greeting rituals, need to take same route or eat food every day).

3. Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus (e.g., strong attachment to or preoccupation with unusual objects, excessively circumscribed or perseverative interest).

4. Hyper- or hyperactivity to sensory input or unusual interests in sensory aspects of the environment (e.g., apparent indifference to pain/temperature, adverse response to specific sounds or textures, excessive smelling or touching of objects, visual fascination with lights or movement).

**C. Symptoms must be present in the early developmental period** (but may not become fully manifest until social demands exceed limited capacities, or may be masked by learned strategies in later life).
D. Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning.

E. These disturbances are not better explained by intellectual disability (intellectual developmental disorder) or global developmental delay. Intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder frequently co-occur; to make comorbid diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability, social communication should be below that expected for general developmental level. (Autism Speaks, 2016). All of these factors have a direct impact on the type of learning environment best suited to the autistic child and have serious repercussions for educators wishing to provide an inclusive educational setting for children with autism within the mainstream classroom.

Autism is considered a spectrum of disorders, and while the above-mentioned criteria and characteristics are indicative of autism, every autistic child is different and will display varying degrees of severity of impairment in the various categories. This fact, coupled with the fact that children with autism often also suffer from other related disorders and degrees of mental retardation, means that each autistic child is different and must be catered for on an individual. (Ministry of Education, 2000). That said, there are certain commonalities that exist, and strategies that the mainstream teacher of the autistic child may utilize in order to provide a learning environment that benefits both the autistic child and his or her classroom peers.

Autistic children are also often referred to as ‘high functioning’ or ‘low functioning;’ high functioning being those autistic children who have a normal level of intelligence and low functioning being those children with autism who also have some level of intellectual disability (Ministry of Education, 2000). It is most often the high functioning autistic child that is able to be successfully included within the mainstream educational framework. It is a policy of several countries, including the United States of America (Griffin Roberts, 2008), for a child to be educated in the least restrictive environment that they can possibly be accommodated in. This is a challenge for mainstream teachers who may not have received any specific training on strategies to employ with the autistic child.

Education Programs for the Autistic Child

In programs developed for use in segregated special needs facilities, intensive behavioral techniques are employed to teach specific skills. These skills may be life skills, social skills or academic skills. Most programs employ Intensive Behavioral Intervention (IBI), based upon Applied Behavioral Analysis principles (ABA). Programs are individualized and usually use one to one teaching for a minimum of twenty hours per week, although small group work may also be utilized. Student cooperation is maintained using positive outcomes and rewards. These programs are highly structured and aim to provide the student with basic skills that will promote adult independence by developing and maintaining useful and adaptive behaviors and eradicating inappropriate or dysfunctional behaviors. (Parsons et al., 2011)

Discrete Trial Training (DTT) is one particularly highly utilized teaching technique which comes under the umbrella of IBI. This technique involves breaking down tasks into multiple steps which are then taught gradually and repeatedly until mastery is achieved.

Consensus exists on the need for early assessment and intervention in order to recognize the specific needs of each child and to improve his or her emotional, educational, social and cognitive development. There is no conclusive evidence to show that any one particular type of intervention is best, although early intervention has proven to be effective. Disagreement lies in how best to provide for the needs of the autistic child; in special needs facilities or within the mainstream learning environment. More research is needed in this area due to the lack of empirical data to support one view over the other. (Humphrey & Symes, 2011; Parsons et al., 2011)

Educational Program at the Child Care Center, Sultan Qaboos University

The early childhood program at Sultan Qaboos University is based upon a combination of well recognized educational philosophies. It utilizes aspects of Montessori, Marie Clay and Vigotsky. The rubrics for the program covers the following learning areas:
Language
Oral communication, reading, writing and understanding media materials

Mathematics
Number sense and numeration, measurement, spatial sense and geometry, patterning and data management and probability.

Science and Technology
Biology and exploration and experimentation.

The arts: Visual arts, music, drama and movement
Creative activity and response to artwork.

Personal and Social Development
Self-Awareness and self-reliance, health and physical activity, social relationships and awareness of surroundings

Islamic Studies
Aqeedah and Quran and Islamic behaviour (Al-Qaryouti, Nachabe, Leeder & Hathway, 2017).

Classroom Environment
Each classroom is well organized into various learning areas including math, language, social studies, science and art. A blocks area is provided for free play and includes props for imaginative play. A mat area is used for group activity time and appropriately sized tables and chairs are placed throughout each room at which children can complete their own activities.

The classrooms are painted in neutral colors and the walls are not decorated, thus reducing visual stimuli and unnecessary distractions that can cause havoc to the autistic child. Because both classes run on the same timetable at the same time there are no noise distractions either (see Figure 2).

Classroom Program
The program is broken into fortnightly chunks. During each two week period the same topic is presented during group activity time; the same gym skills are taught and the same song and story are read. Skills are taught and built upon each consecutive day.

The daily timetable is consistently followed and is the same for both sessions that the child attends, both in the Arabic classroom and the English classroom. This creates a predictability that is very comforting for the autistic child.

Group sessions are only ten minutes in length. Interestingly it has been found that short periods of structured learning are as or more effective than longer sessions as asserted by Colozzi, Ward, and Crotty (Parsons et al., 2011).

Figure 1: Teacher To Student Ratio
Two multi-aged groups of sixteen children spend two and a half to three hours each in two mirrored educational settings; one in English and one in Arabic. The programs in both classes are parallel, with the same topic covered in each class on any given day during the mat session. The program consists of whole group activities which include calendar, story reading, songs and a themed mat session, as well as gym, outdoor play and individual activities. Three teachers are present in each classroom, giving a teacher to student ratio of about one to five, Figure 1 shows the teacher to student ratio.

Figure 2: Classroom Environment
All group lessons, as well as the song and story, incorporate the use of visual and/or concrete materials to facilitate greater understanding. (Moosa et al., 2013). This is particularly helpful to the autistic child who very often takes a visual approach to learning (Teaching Students with Autism, 2000).

The major chunk of each session (approximately one hour) is spent on individual activities. During each individual activity session, the children are asked to complete activities from the various learning areas, appropriate to their level or skill or according to their interests. They also have the opportunity to play in the blocks area, to read and to use the computer or the water table during this time. Each child also spends ten to fifteen minutes at the snack table in quiet conversation with his or her friends.

Vocabulary or skills related to activities that are not yet mastered are noted in each child’s notebook, which is taken home at the end of each day. These simple skills are revised at home. A study by Koegel et al (Parsons et al., 2008) suggests that completing simple related tasks at home or at school, prior to the targeted learning creates greater success. Children most often return to school the following day able to complete the targeted activity and being able to progress to the next level. Individual activities use concrete and semi concrete materials to learn skills and concepts. Each activity has well defined steps that must be followed. This is particularly helpful to the autistic child who benefits from small step instructions and a hands-on approach to learning. (Griffith Roberts, 2008).

When a child masters an activity, they are congratulated for ‘closing their triangle’ and introduced to the next activity in the learning sequence. This is meaningful reinforcement and a natural consequence of their success.

Because all activities are individualized, the child is always working at an appropriate level (see Figure 3). This reduces the frustration for the autistic child who may lack the communication skills to express their frustration appropriately. Individualized instruction also means that the child can work at their own pace. Autistic children often have a delayed response to verbal instructions and may take longer to process information and respond than the typically developing child. (Teaching Students with Autism, 2000).

Figure 3: Individual activity
Given that individualized nature of the learning program, ample opportunity exists for the development of talent within any one sphere of the curriculum spectrum. Autistic children often show remarkable talent or honed interest in abstract skills such as those relating to music, math or decoding. The child has the opportunity to make choices about which learning area they would like to work in and the type of activity they would like to undertake. This is of particular importance to the autistic child who is not always able to make their wants and needs known.

Opportunities for peer communication take place at the snack table, in the blocks area and during outdoor play. Social skills and conversation are explicitly taught as part of the program. This is of importance to the autistic child who may not simply ‘pick up’ the correct way to respond in various social situations (Daily, 2009). The children are taught to independently and appropriately deal with problems that arise between themselves by voicing their needs clearly to their peers, or their teachers if the situation requires that. Physical or otherwise inappropriate responses are not accepted.

Similarly, to the Nest program discussed earlier, the program at the Child Care Center is highly structured to provide predictability and clear expectations. Just like the program trialed in New York, the environment is clutter free and offers few distractions. Visual aids in the form of objects and materials accompany all activities.

**Aims of the Study**

The main aim of the current case study was to investigate the effects of inclusion an autistic child into a normal kindergarten setting. Observations were made of his behavioral and educational achievement. This article aimed to answer the following questions:

1. In which domains of the ASDA scale did ‘Ahmad’ show notable improvement?
2. In which areas of the academic program did ‘Ahmad’ show notable improvement?

**Inclusion in Classroom Setting**

Despite the fact that inconclusive data exists to support inclusion, the perceived benefits of inclusion are numerous, for both the autistic child and his or her peers. Inclusion is also the preferred option of parents, who overall, desire their children to be in the most inclusive environment possible (Patten Koenig et al., 2014).

Generally, it is the academically capable autistic child who is eligible for inclusion. Despite this, they may present other behaviors which make it difficult for them to adapt to the classroom environment. Often their responses to the sensory environment will be atypical. The child may have difficulty self-regulating his or her behavior and may also experience great difficulty with social engagement. These factors can have a huge impact on their chances of academic success and life opportunities. (Leach & Duffy, 2009).

Social adaption is vital to the future success of the autistic child and the mainstream setting provides the opportunity for the child to be ‘taught’ social skills by not only the teacher, but by classroom peers as well. Social skills are also modeled in a way that cannot occur in a segregated setting. Socialization is greater in the child directed setting, whether it be in small groups or one to one. The inclusion setting creates ample opportunities for this and for personal growth and acceptance to occur. However, social skills are most often not ‘picked up’ by autistic children, and need to be specifically taught through social competence training based upon cognitive behavioral therapy or ‘social stories.’ While these strategies are directed at fulfilling the specific needs of the autistic child, all children can benefit from direct teaching of social skills. (Parsons et al., 2011).

Similarly, there is some evidence to suggest that a child centered, rather than teacher led approach, is more effective in facilitating play. Typically developing peers can also be paired with the autistic child, and encouraged to follow the lead of the autistic child. This type of less structured and more naturalistic approach has shown promising signs of improving the social interaction of autistic children. (Parsons et al., 2011)

Inclusion of an autistic child teaches his or her mainstream peers the importance of the acceptance of every individual. It also provides them with appropriate skills in dealing with difference. (Humphrey & Symes; Griffith Roberts, 2008).

Although the autistic child may benefit indirectly from the inclusion environment it is also
vital that he receives systemic support according to his specific needs. Training parents in the areas of social and communicative interaction is also of paramount importance. (Lindsay, Proulx, Thomson & Scott, 2013; Parsons et al., 2011).

Many programs of an inclusive nature that currently exist are not based upon any research but rather have developed based upon the experience of practitioners and teachers in the field. (Parsons et al., 2011).

One program that has been trialed in New York public schools is the Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Nest program. This program provides support and training to teachers, parents and other professionals involved in the care of the autistic child, and provides a link between the school and home. Support is provided to ease the transition from home to school. P.L 99-457 cited the family as the primary learning environment for infants and young children. It stated that a critical need existed for parents and professionals to function in a collaborative fashion (Nuttal, Romero & Kalesnik, 1992).

Nest classrooms are organized to minimize distractions, provide predictable routines and develop clear expectations. Visual aids are incorporated due to the fact that many ASD children process information visually rather than auditory. Teachers are taught the positive behavior support technique to address impeding behaviors and replace them with appropriate behaviors which serve the same function for the child. It is a proactive technique which aims to render inappropriate behaviors useless (Burack, Root & Zigler, 1997; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Patten Koenig et al., 2014).

These factors are vital to the success of any program aimed at including the autistic child. Parsons et al (2011) conducted an international review of research related to educational provision for autistic children. They concluded that it was necessary to provide a range of different strategies and methodologies to provide for the wide diversity of needs of children with autism. Intensive behavioural techniques were found to be successful in teaching specific skills to some children, however it was noted that success cannot be based only upon academic outcomes. Of vital importance is the acquisition of communicative competency, social understanding, physical and emotional well-being and independence skills.

They also found that many programs were based upon the experience of practitioners in the field, rather than upon research, and that more research is needed to establish what works best for children on the autism spectrum. Patten Koenig et al., (2014) explored the implementation of the Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Nest program in public schools in New York City. They noted that many children with autism are educated in separate specialized facilities while others are placed in more inclusive environments, but without the support that such a placement necessitates. This often results in problems which lead to these children being moved to increasingly restrictive environments.

Lynch and Irvine (2009) advocate an inclusive model of education for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) students which is authentic and provides the support required to help all children succeed. Inclusion is not just inclusion, but adjusting the program to cater for individual needs. Their model necessitates that all classrooms include elements that will facilitate success for ASD children. The greatest benefits they see are the opportunity for enhanced personal growth, greater opportunities for social interaction and learning from peers, and acceptance.

Eldar, Talmor, and Wolf-Zukerman (2010) reported that children with autism display greater levels of social interaction when among typical children. They also can be exposed to positive role models and engage as members of the same society that they will eventually share as adults.

Method

Sample

Ahmad (not the child’s real name) was four years and one month of age. He is an autistic child and subject of this case study.

Instruments

Entrance test and parent interview

Entrance testing for the 2014/2015 school year took place in March of 2014. This testing consists of an assessment of the child’s ability in English and Arabic as well as their fine and gross motor skills. Anecdotal notes are rec-
ordered regarding the child’s general behavior and attentiveness to the tasks performed. A parent interview is also conducted in which the aims of the program are outlined. Further information is collected about the child’s habits and behavior in this interview.

The Arab Scale for Detecting Autism

The Arab Scale for Detecting Autism - ASDA, (Al Qaryouti & Ababneh, 2006) was administered to make the assessment of autism. This test consists of five domains, communication and social interaction, stereotypical behaviors, self-awareness and awareness of others, sensory-motor disorders and aggressive behavior. The scale showed that the factorial and discriminant validity were significant. The dimensions which extracted accounted for 59.11% of the total variance; moreover, the discriminant analysis showed that the scale has the power to classify more than 77.2% of the cases correctly. The reliability coefficient calculated by Cronbach alpha was 0.89, whereas reliability coefficients for the dimensions of the scale ranged between 0.42 and 0.89. The t-test showed that the differences between performance means of autistics and Normal children were statistically significant.

Study Limitation

The program applied in only one specialized child center, but not inclusive school. The Entrance test, parent interview and The Arab Scale for Detecting Autism, was used in the study.

Result and Discussion

Date collection and analysis

The entrance test and parent interview

At the time of this testing ‘Ahmad’ (not the child’s real name) was four years and one month of age. The assessing teachers were not informed of any suspicion of a learning disorder. They noted that ‘Ahmad’ was very quiet and did not make any eye contact at all. He did not respond when spoken to. He would only respond when he knew something, otherwise he would remain silent. In both English and Arabic, he had some knowledge of shapes and numbers. He could name some objects but did not show understanding of any verbs presented. He used a left-handed, whole hand grip when writing. He appeared to lack concentration and displayed unclear speech in both languages. He pushed in his chair when he stood up.

During the parent interview the mother informed the teacher that ‘Ahmad’ would eat the same thing for a week or more, while refusing to eat anything else. He was verbally unresponsive except if a discussion related to numerals and letters of the alphabet. He had been registered in another school the previous year and the teachers had complained constantly about his lack of response and participation and unwillingness to speak. The mother had not been provided with any label for what she was seeing in her child but she had noted that his behaviors were not normal.

The Arab Scale for Detecting Autism Assessment 1

The Arab Scale for Detecting Autism - ASDA, (Al Qaryouti & Ababneh, 2006) was administered to make the assessment of autism. This test consists of five domains as follows, with the number of items in each domain as indicated in Table 1 below, tallying to a total of sixty-four items. The third column indicates the highest possible score within the domain, while the last indicates the score which ‘Ahmad’ achieved in each. The data was collected by the researchers, from the child’s mother and during the observation of the child in different settings.

<table>
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<th>Degree of the lower boundary</th>
<th>Degree of the upper boundary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Communication and social interaction</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypical behaviors</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-awareness and awareness of others</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensory-motor disorders</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive behavior</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 1: ASDA Domains and Assessment 1 Scores

<table>
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<th>Normal</th>
<th>Suspicion of Autism</th>
<th>Autism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: ASDA Scale Grading for Assessment 1
This test was conducted in September of 2014, when ‘Ahmad’ had just entered the Child Care Center to begin his studies there. His result indicated a diagnosis of definitive autism. At this time, he was four years and seven months of age. The area of greatest concern, according to these results, was that of communication and social interaction. ‘Ahmad’ also scored high in self-awareness and awareness of others.

It was noted during ‘Ahmad’s’ first few months at school that he did not express any feelings by way of facial expressions or body language. He did not make eye contact or engage in conversation of any kind with either the teachers or other children. He was unresponsive when questions were asked of him that were not directly related to his learning and had to be taught appropriate social responses. He was fearful of the hand dryer initially and it took a few months of gentle encouragement before he was able to use it comfortably. He was unable to let his needs known and would respond to requests he was unhappy with by simply standing in one place and not responding. If another child annoyed him he would respond by screaming. He was often unwilling to eat his snack and had to be guided through the snack time routines of washing his hands and cleaning his place after eating. He would not initiate any speech. He would only respond, and even then, it was a seldom occurrence and almost always related to his academic activities. He was unable to make choices when presented to him.

The teachers met with ‘Ahmad’s’ mother in early November of 2014. She reported progress in Ahmad’s social learning. He had started to use some sentences at home and to play with other children where previously he had always remained beside her. The family had previously not known how Ahmad felt towards them but he had started to express some feelings at home. She also said that if he ever became upset they would show him number toys and he would quickly forget whatever had troubled him.

The teachers reported that ‘Ahmad’ was unable to make choices when presented by the teacher and that it was necessary to direct him to do his activities and that he would not independently move between his activities or choose an activity to undertake.

A few months into the program ‘Ahmad’ started to respond with learnt phrases like “I am fine” when asked “How are you?” He also began to actively participate during group sessions by making simple responses to questions about learnt concepts that did not involve anything more than repeating a learnt word or phrase. He would occasionally make a little eye contact and sometimes chose an independent activity in the outdoor area.

Children are required to place their hand on a teacher’s shoulder upon completion of their activity so that it can be checked. ‘Ahmad’ started to do this in February of 2015. He also began to make simple responses to questions like “Have you eaten your snack?” Previously he would not respond.

A further parent-teacher conference took place at the end of February. ‘Ahmad’s’ mother showed the teachers a video of ‘Ahmad’ at home answering her questions. He was responding with phrases and sentences. She said that previously he was unresponsive and that she had felt that he wasn’t able to understand her. His mother expressed concern that ‘Ahmad’ was unable to defend himself and the teachers discussed ways of teaching ‘Ahmad’ specific responses that he could use when faced with a problem. She said there had been no improvement in ‘Ahmad’s’ eating habits.

**Assessment 2 (Phase 1)**

A further assessment was made in March of 2015, again using the ASDA. The results were as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Score Achieved</th>
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<tr>
<td>Communication and social interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stereotypical behaviors</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-awareness and awareness of others</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensory motor disorders</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive behavior</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120</td>
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</table>

Table 2: ASDA Assessment 2 Scores
This subsequent test indicated a diagnosis of suspicion of autism. ‘Ahmad’ had made significant progress in the area of communication and social interaction whilst still remaining an area of concern. The score he received in this area was 78, down from 96 in the previous assessment. Although this score indicated that considerable progress had occurred, the score was still far off the baseline score of 37. Some improvement could also be noted for the area of self-awareness and awareness of others, the score having come down from 23 to 21, the baseline being 10.

These scores accurately portrayed what was being witnessed of ‘Ahmad’ s’ behavior in the classroom. While he was becoming far more responsive and communicative, it was still evident that his awareness of himself or those around him was minimal.

Assessment 3 (Phase 2)

A final assessment was undertaken in May of 2016, upon completion of ‘Ahmad’s’ two years of pre-schooling at the Child Care Center at the Sultan Qaboos University, in order to ascertain the level of autism that he was exhibiting. This was supplemented by an interview with his mother to gauge her level of satisfaction with the program outcomes.

The results from applying the scale for detecting autism were as follows:

The results show a further marked improvement in communication and social skills as well as in the development of self-awareness and awareness of others. The score for communication and social skills made a further leap down from 78 to 62, the lower boundary being 37. In the initial assessment, ‘Ahmad’ had scored 96 in this domain, very close to the upper boundary of 111. The score for self-awareness and awareness of others also fell considerably, from 21 to 16, inching towards the lower boundary of 10. The areas of stereotype behaviors, senso-motor disorders and aggressive behavior were never of any particular concern, ‘Ahmad’ having achieved scores within the normal range since the outset of the study. In fact, he achieved the baseline score for senso-motor and aggressive behavior on all three assessments. As was discussed earlier, a diagnosis of autism does not necessitate that a child displays autistic behaviors in all domains (Teaching Students with Autism, 2000).

It was in the social domain that the most improvement was noted. His mother had seen a progressive and marked improvement in his social skills and ability to communicate his needs. This was consistent with the research of Eldar, Talmor, and Wolf-Zukerman (2010), who reported that children with autism display greater levels of social interaction when among typical children. At home, he would talk about the activities he has undertaken, who he played with and any new activities introduced at school. He particularly enjoyed reporting to his father about scores achieved by himself or his sisters while playing racing games on the computer. At school, he made eye contact much more often and initiated simple discussion about himself and his surroundings. (e.g. ‘I like circles!’) While this be-
gan as a very occasional incident it became more and more prevalent in his behavior as the year progressed. He began answering questions which required a yes or no answer with confidence. He would ask questions to fulfill his needs, such as asking about the activities that he needed to complete in the classroom, however at times his speech would be unclear or unintelligible.

Although his communication skills were greatly improved his mother reported that he still hesitated to talk to strangers. When extended family members wanted to strike up a conversation with him they had learnt to begin with some talk involving numbers in order to make ‘Ahmad’ comfortable.

He tutored peers at the request of his teachers. His mother said that he would assist his sister in grade two with her math homework also. He had begun to show some interest in playing interactively with his friends, yet seemed to enjoy engaging in activities alone more often. During his first year of schooling he tended to make activity choices based upon the choices of children he liked, while not actually engaging with them. His mother noted that whilst previously he had simply followed his older sisters in their play outside the house, he had gained confidence and had begun to choose activities independently.

His mother said that he no longer reacted to loud noises like he did with the hand dryer when he first began school. She said that he was showing much more awareness of those around him and would mention if someone was sick or sad.

By the end of the school year ‘Ahmad’ could often be seen smiling and showing happiness in his face and body language. He started to show some expression of happiness and pride in his achievements early in the school year and ended it with obvious acknowledgement visible in his body language and facial expressions. His mother reported that just prior to the end of the school year he verbally expressed his feelings to her for the first time when she laughed at him and he told her that he felt angry.

Although social skills are taught as part of the program of the Center, a focus was placed on this area of learning in order to benefit ‘Ahmad’ and all of the children in attendance. Research indicates that autistic children benefit from social competence training (Parsons et al, 2014). This, coupled with the ample opportunities for socialization and personal growth presented by the mainstream classroom, meant that ‘Ahmad’ had every opportunity to develop in this area. Particular care was taken to utilize the opportunity to reinforce appropriate responses when specific incidents occurred. It was noted that by the end of the school year ‘Ahmad’ was consistently applying the social skills that he has been taught in the classroom to solve social problems that arose in the classroom environment. He would defend himself verbally if his learning was disrupted or his rights were not fulfilled. He would complain to the teachers about any situation that he couldn’t resolve by himself.

‘Ahmad’s’ mother was still very concerned about his inability to defend himself physically. He would not even raise his hands as a defensive measure if another child tried to hit or push him. It was suggested that ‘Ahmad’ may benefit from learning specific skills in physical defense, such as karate or tai kwon do.

Both the teachers and his mother had noticed that, when faced with many choices, ‘Ahmad’ became immobile. When the choice was limited to only a few items he was more able to make a decision. This was noted in his inability to choose an activity in the classroom when given free range and by his mother when given the opportunity to choose a toy from the store.

‘Ahmad’ had shown a particular consciousness of time. He was completely aware of the classroom program and the time at which different sessions should begin and end. He would often remind the teacher of how much time she had left to complete a group activity with the children or would tell the teacher that he did not have enough time to complete a particular activity before the individual activity time would come to an end.

An improvement in eating habits had been noted by his mother. He was more willing to try new foods. ‘Ahmad’s’ academic progress was amazing. By the end of the school year he was reading and writing in both English and Arabic. He loves shapes and numerals and much of his early writing centered around these themes. With encouragement, he began to write on other topics. His reading was still
largely phonetic and he relied heavily on decoding as a means of deciphering print, however his understanding and use of picture cues and syntax was improving. In math he engaged in activities using fractions and large numbers. He was able to complete equations in addition, subtraction and multiplication and solve word problems which required the use of any of these. His fine motor skills improved greatly. He could use scissors and a ruler competently. He participated in story discussion and could scribe a story to the teacher when provided with a picture. He was very capable of making story predictions, Figure 5 and Figure 6 show samples of his work in the English class.

Figure 5: Language Work Sample
Figure 6: Math Work Sample
Conclusion

The program at the Child Care Center is one which caters well for the needs of the mildly autistic child by providing a structured and predictable learning environment. Having professional teachers with solid background in autism along with the daily fixed activities, in the same time and same places with the same teachers in Arabic and English sections, and the use of visual aids in all learning areas is of great benefit and the individualized learning program means that every child can progress at their own rate. The success displayed by ‘Ahmad’ is indicative of the vital role that can be played by the mainstream school environment in assisting children with autism to overcome some of the behaviors which impede their ability to participate actively in all aspects of their lives. While ‘Ahmad’ had entered the Child Care Center program clearly autistic, his behavior developed to such a degree that, upon completion, he could be considered outside of the autistic range. Furthermore, the notable decrement in the autistic symptoms that ‘Ahmad’ initially displayed, achieved through treatment was reflected on his social behavior and communication skills with his peers and teachers, positively affecting his educational improvement in the program, especially in language and math skills.

‘Ahmad’s’ teachers feel confident that with continued support, he will grow and further develop his skills in communication and interacting with others and go on to engage fully in the next school program he enters.

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Autism Speaks (2016) What is Autism. DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria, retrieved from https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-

autism/disgnosis/dsm-5-diagnostic-criteria


مجلة الدراسات التربوية والنفسية

مجلة دورية محكمة متخصصة، تصدر عن جامعة السلطان قابوس، وتعد نشاط الدراسات والبحوث الأصلية التي توافر فيها مقومات البحث العلمي من حيث أصله الفكر ووضوح المنهجية. ودقة التوثيق، في مجالات الناهج وطرق التدريس، ومعلنة النرويج، وللدراسة، ودراسة الأدوار التربوية، كما تنشر المجلة تقارير المؤتمرات والندوات التربوية، ومراجعات الكتب التربوية والنفسية الحديثة، وملخصات الرسائل الجامعية في مجالات التربية المختلفة.

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أعضاء هيئة التحرير

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هيئة الاعتماد العلمية

| المقدم | د. أمين عبد المındم | |
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| د. محمد عبد المındم | |

المجلة الحادية عشر - العدد الرابع - اكتوبر - 2017

 حقوق الطبع © 2017 إلى حاملة مساهمة الدراسات النفسية والنفسية، والمجلة غير مسؤولة عن الأراء المنشورة فيها حيث أنها تمثل آراء الباحثين (المؤلفين).

 الاتصالات من خلال مكتبها: مجلة الدراسات التربوية والنفسية، جامعة السلطان قابوس، صب 3، مسقط 12-سلطنة عمان - هاتف ٢٤٤٤٣٧٨ (٢٠٠٩) - هاتف مسمى: 24443817 (٢٠٠٩) - بريد إلكتروني: jesedu@squ.edu.om
قواعد النشر (موجهة للمؤلفين والمحكمين)

التحكيم

ترسل جميع البحوث المقدمة للنشر إلى متخصصين لتحكيمها حسب الأصول العلمية. ينضف البحث القبول النهائي بعد أن يجري الباحث التعديلات التي يتطلبه المحكرون. والباحثون مسؤولون عن محتويات إجاباتهم، فالبحث المنشور تعبر عن وجهة نظر صانعيهما وليس عن وجهة نظر المجلة. كما أن البحوث المرسلة إلى المجلة تخضع لفحص أولي تقوم بهيئة التحرير. تقرر أهلية البحث للتحكيم والتمكيم بقواعد النشر. ويحق للهيئة التحرير أن تعتبر على قبول البحث من دون إبداء الأسباب.

شروط النشر

تؤخذ هيئة التحرير على ضرورة الالتزام بشروط النشر بشكل شامل، إذ أن البحوث التي لا تلتزم بشروط النشر، النشر سوف لن ينظر فيها وثداء إلى أصحابها مباشرة حتى يتم التقيد بشروط النشر.

1. تقدم نسخة إلكترونية من البحث على برنامج Word من خلال إيميل المجلة jesedu@squ.edu.om.

2. يتم تكتيب البحث باللغة العربية باستخدام خط Simplified Arabic بحجم 12 ويعوض حجم Time New Romans. الوارد منها 2 سملوي وسفل ويسير، و3 سملوي، وترك مستوفى ونص بين السطور.

3. يتم تكتيب البحث باللغة الإنجليزية باستخدام خط Time New Romans بحجم 12 ويعوض حجم 2 سملوي وسفل ويسير، و3 سملوي، وترك مستوفى ونص بين السطور.

4. لا يزيد عدد صفحات البحث عن 8000 صكالة بما في ذلك الأشكال والمراجع والجدول. وإن لا يزيد عدد الجداول عن 7 جداول.

5. أنه لا يمكن أن يتم نشر البحث أو مقدمة النشر في مجلة أخرى؛ ويتبع الباحث بذلك بعدم تقديم بحثه للنشر إلى جهة أخرى إلى أن يتم اتخاذ القرار المناسب بٌ هذا الشأن. ويتبع الباحث الرئيسي بأنه مطلع على شروط النشر في المجلة والتمكيم بها.

6. إن لا يكون البحث جزءاً من كتاب منشور.

7. لا يجوز نشر البحث أو إجزاء منه في مكان آخر، بعد إقرار نشره في مجلة الدراسات التربوية والنفسية بجامعة السلطان قابوس، إلا بعد الحصول على إذن صريحة بذلك من رئيس التحرير.

8. موافقة الباحث على نقل حقوق النشر طاقة إلى المجلة. وإذا رغبت المجلة في إعادة نشر البحث فإن عليها أن تحصل على موافقة مكتبية من صاحبه.

9. يجب أن يرقع مع البحث ملخص واحد باللغة العربية وآخر باللغة الإنجليزية ولا يزيد عدد صفحاتهما عن 200 صكالة.

10. يلتزم الباحثون في صيغة توثيقهم عند توثيق مراجعهم بدليل الرابطة الأمريكية لعلم النفس الإصدار الخامس، علمًا بأن البحوث التي لا تلتزم بهذا الدليل سوف يتم إعادتها إلى أصحابها دون تحكيمها.

لمجلة الدراسات التربوية والنفسيةحقتان، يجب طلب حذف أو تعديل أي جزء من البحث بما يتفق مع
سياسة النشر في المجلة:

1. يبلغ الباحثون قرارة التحرير في غضون ثلاثة إلى ستة شهور من تاريخ استلام البحث.
2. إرفاق أدوات البحث معه.
3. تعرية البحث بمساحة مدع بحثه.

ملاحظة هامة: للمحوت المقدمة باللغة العربية. تستخدم الأرقام الهندية (في المتن والجدول والمراجع) إلا في حالة أن المرجع باللغة الإنجليزية عليها استخدام الأرقام العربية. كما يجب أن تكون الفصلة العشرينية للأرقام الهندية كما هو واضح في المقال أدناه، وسوف يتم إعادة البحث الذي لا تلتزم أرقامه بهذا النظام.

مثال: (الفصلة العشرية: شفت مع حرف الها العربي); أما الفصلة في النص فتكون ( ) من شفت وحرف النون العربي.

تنشر المجلة البحوث:

1. الميدانية / الأميرقية الأصلية.
2. النوعية التحليلية.
3. ملخصات وعروض الكتب الجديدة.
4. المراجعات النقدية للأدب التراثي والتنسي.

متطلبات إعداد البحث:

1. يجب أن تتضمن مسودة البحث:
   - صفحة مفصلة عليها اسم البحث وعنوانه بعد عنوان البحث مباشرة باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية.
   - ويستشف بيريد الإلكترونية.
   - ملخصين أحدهما بالعربية والأخر بالإنجليزية لا يتجاوزان مجملهما منهما ملتئمًا شكلموث.
   - خمس مظمومات متقدم.
2. مسودة البحث وتكون من الأجزاء التالية:
   - مقدمة، وتشمل الإطار النظري للبحث، وتكون الدراسات السابقة جزءًا منها ومندمجة في جسم المقدمة (أو بدون عنوان مستقل).
   - مشرفولة الدراسة وإهدفها وأسلحتها أو فرضياتها.
   - أهمية الدراسة ومحدداتها.
   - الطرقية وإجراءات الدراسة، وتتضمن (المجتمع والمدين، وأدوات الدراسة: والتعريفات الإجرائية للمصطلحات، وصول الأداة وثباتها وإجراءات الدراسة، وطريقة تحليل البيانات).
3. النتائج، وتشمل هذا الاسم على نتائج التحليل والجدول والأشكال والتعليم عليها.
4. المناقشة: يمكن في بعض الأحيان دمج المناقشة مع النتائج
5. المراجع.
6. اللاحق، إن وجد.

تدرج الرسوم البيانية، والأشكال التوضيحية في النص، وتكون باللونين الأبيض والأسود وترقيم ترقيما متسلسلا، وتكتب أسماؤها وعناوينها واللاحظات التوضيحية تحتها.
نموذج للتوثيق حسب نظام الرابطة الأمريكية لعلم النفس (APA)

ملاحظة: البحوث التي لا تتزامن بدقة بهذا النظام تعد إلى أصحابها بدون تحكم.

كتاب (مؤلف واحد)

قائمة المراجع:

نص:

كتاب (أكثر من مؤلف واحد)

قائمة المراجع:

النص:

قصيل، إيليا
قائمة المراجع:

نص:

قصيل، إيليا
قائمة المراجع:

نص:

قصيل، إيليا
قائمة المراجع:

نص:

قصيل، إيليا
قائمة المراجع:
تزايد تداعيات الركود العالمي على ألمانيا (2009). الوطن الاقتصادي، الكويت، الكويت، 31، 177.

نص:
تزايد تداعيات الركود العالمي على ألمانيا (2009). الوطن الاقتصادي، الكويت، الكويت، 31، 177.
النص:

("تزايد تداعيات الركود"، 2009)

مواقع الإنترنت متخصصة

قائمة المراجع:


النص:

(رابطة الاخصائيين النفسيين المصرية [رئايم]، 2008)

(رئايم، 2008)

(قائمة المراجع:


النص:

(عاشور، 2008 أو عاشور (2008)
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المحتويات
مجلة
الدراسات التربوية والنفسية

مجلة علمية محكمة
تصدرها جامعة السلطان قابوس