



Saudi women's leadership self-efficacy, their self-beliefs, organizational responsiveness and leadership styles in academia

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on women in higher education in Saudi Arabia, where they are currently experiencing a new historical period through Vision 2030. Vision 2030 is an economic transformation plan that aims to develop Saudi Arabia by diversifying sources of income, thereby empowering Saudi women for new leadership positions and giving them more authority. This led this doctoral thesis to search for academic women's self-efficacy in leadership, specifically in the position of dean and head of department.

Self-efficacy is described as the individual's ability to perform specific skills. This study aims to bridge the knowledge gap in Saudi studies, which concentrate on the constraints women encounter prior to Vision 2030 and the prospects they encounter post-Vision 2030. However, this study aims to provide light on the behaviours of women who are presently experiencing a change between the phases of constraints and opportunities. It is crucial for women to comprehend their identities and the factors that shape them in their roles as leaders.

Thus, self-efficacy is a cognitive-behavioral theory that can provide us with a deep understanding of the sample's experiences, skills, and management style. This theory has been employed to understand women's leadership from several aspects, such as internal aspects such as beliefs and external aspects such as organisation, which contributes to a deeper understanding of what affects the self-efficacy of leadership. I used a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with 18 participants from four different governmental universities in Riyadh. The findings were analyzed by applying self-efficacy theory as a framework and following a theory-driven approach, which allows for acquiring in-depth knowledge.

The study's findings revealed that Saudi women's leadership self-efficacy is influenced by five sources: experience, training, role models, verbal influence, and emotional effects. All these sources play a significant role in shaping the effectiveness and performance of women in their roles. However, some of these sources, such as training, have less impact than others due to their poor quality or lack of availability. Additionally, the study delved into how women's inner beliefs about their role and work influence their leadership behaviors, revealing that these beliefs can have either a positive or negative impact. Nevertheless, some participants were able to overcome the obstacles in their beliefs and solve the problem they faced. Finally, the findings revealed that organizational culture, one of the self-efficacy theory factors, influences the leadership style of women. There are three types of organizations: responsive, semi-responsive, and unresponsive. The level of responsiveness varies depending on the advantages and challenges present in

the environment. The responsive leadership style influences leaders to adopt more positive leadership styles, such as transformational and strategic, with the aim of motivating their workplace and employees. Whereas the semi-responsive impact leaders follow leadership style to manage both the negative and positive sides, such as conflict management approaches. While the unresponsive one limited the majority of leaders to following different leadership styles, most of them followed only one style, which is the democratic one.

Moreover, the amplification of this study contributes to empowering women smoothly in leadership roles. Understanding how each source of leadership self-efficacy can either limit or enhance their leadership abilities is crucial. Further, some sources can be more effective in one culture while they may not be in another one. Therefore, applying this theory in different contexts can help policymakers develop their organizations and leaders' performances.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Saudi Arabia plays a significant role in the Islamic world and in Arab countries, on political, historical, religious and economic levels (Alammash et al., 2021). However, the status of Saudi women, and in particular their rights and restrictions, has been one of the hottest debates for more than ten years. Recently, changes in Saudi Arabia have been implemented due to Vision 2030. One of the aims of Vision 2030 is to advance the power and progress of Saudi women in leadership roles in a number of different fields, including that of higher education. This research aims to explore in depth the positions of Saudi women leaders in higher education who have experienced such changes, how they manage their current management roles, and to understand more about how the women behave as a result. This chapter will elucidate the structure of the thesis, provide an introduction to Vision 2030 and the situation of Saudi women - and present the research questions, the study's rationale, and its original contribution to knowledge.

1. Vision 2030

Saudi Arabia witnessed a new phase of leadership mindset through the appointment of Prince Mohamed bin Salman (b.1985) as the leader of the state, its crown prince, and the youngest leader of any country in the world. With his appointment, the phase of change in Saudi Arabia began through Vision 2030, which he personally announced to the Saudi people in 2016 (Vision 2030, 2016; Saleh & Malibari, 2021).

Saudi Arabia is one of the most important countries in the world for the production and export of oil, which is the main source of income for the country (Mohiuddin et al., 2023). However, Saudi Arabia has experienced various challenges in global markets, politics and the economy that negatively affect oil prices, such as war amongst other issues (Abuhjeeleh, 2019). These events increased the importance of Vision 2030, which aims to develop and diversify the economy.

Moreover, the economy is a crucial component of Saudi society, which means that planning for change in economic resources requires a shift in Saudi society. Saudi

society has a specific culture and traditions that have hindered economic growth, and the need to empower women and value their competencies will be discussed in depth in the second chapter of the thesis (Alessa et al., 2022).

Vision 2030 encompasses a set of development objectives that originate from three primary pillars: fostering a dynamic society, fostering a prosperous economy, and fostering an ambitious nation (Vision 2030, 2016; Alharbi, 2022). Nevertheless, as this thesis focus on women in leadership, it will discuss and present the influence of the Vision on Saudi women's life.

Saudi Vision 2030 aims to increase the number of women in the Saudi workforce and empower them to take up new leadership positions, which is a major change to the previous experience of Saudi women (Almawi, 2022). This has been one of the motivations for conducting a study focusing on the self-efficacy of leadership. However, before introducing Saudi women and Vision 2030, this study will introduce the Vision in the other GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries.

Adopting Vision 2030 to reform the social and economic situation is not a novel concept in the GCC. Countries bordering Saudi Arabia - including the Emirates and Qatar – have effectively implemented Vision 2030, which was a transformative initiative for them (Golkowska, 2017; Hesketh and Williams, 2021). In the context of Qatar, the Qatar National Vision 2030 aimed at a holistic approach to women's empowerment. For example, the country has made great strides in promoting education and has increased the number of scholarships and grants allocated to female students in various fields such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Al-Qahtani et al., 2022). Moreover, the focus on the advancement of women to leadership positions has led to the appointment of women to prominent roles in government institutions and the private sector, particularly in roles that break traditional gender barriers – for example in Qatar Airways, a national carrier in the aviation industry (Golkowska, 2017).

In the UAE, one of the decisions resulting from Vision 2030 initiatives was the establishment of the Gender Balance Council in 2017, which aims to promote gender equality and women's participation in all sectors. As a result, the UAE has seen an increase in the number of women in decision-making positions, including in the cabinet

and on corporate boards (Hesketh and Williams, 2021).

Vision 2030 In Saudi Arabia is similar to Vision 2030 in Qatar and the Emirates, in terms of focusing on empowering Saudi women. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 not only concentrates on national development but also seeks to position the country within the global context; thus, enhancing women's access to higher education and augmenting their participation in the workforce and decision-making roles is a strategy that aligns with global developments. The approach complies with UNESCO's support of gender equality in leadership, the World Bank's objectives for women's economic involvement, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5) (Knight, 2006; Shields,2013).

According to the latest statistics, the total number of working women was 52% of the Saudi workforce in 2018, compared to 12.8% in 2008 (Statistics 2008; 2018). In addition, In the fourth quarter of 2021, the percentage of women in the labour force increased to 30.4% of the total population (Statistics, 2022). A significant gender shift is happening in the context of Saudi Arabia's workplace, but we do not yet fully understand its effect or its implications for society, nor its effects or implications for the women undertaking those roles (Tameem, 2019).

While the Saudi government is working on a female empowerment plan to increase opportunities and open the door for women to take up higher positions, the majority of Saudi women hold subordinate jobs (Ahmed, 2020). As notable exceptions, the Saudi princess, Rema Sultan, is the first female Ambassador to the United States (Shahab et al., 2021), and Dr Tamader Youssef Al Rammah has been appointed as Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Development - the first woman to hold the position (Czornik, 2020).

However, despite these recent improvements, historically, Saudi women in leadership roles have faced various challenges due to a variety of factors such as stereotyping, social and personal difficulties, and problems with organisational structures (Alotaibi, 2020; Alghofaily, 2019; Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

Furthermore, globally, women leaders in higher education face distinct challenges in their roles. Despite advancements, men still dominate many sectors of academia,

particularly in senior positions and STEM disciplines. Women frequently encounter skepticism regarding their competence and authority, particularly in academic environments where professional legitimacy is intimately associated with qualifications, tenure, and intellectual output. Academic leadership is distinctive in that leaders are also scholars, frequently tasked with contributing to their discipline through study and publishing. This dual role can be particularly challenging, as they have to manage leadership obligations while sustaining their research duties, a balance that is often undervalued in numerous non-academic leadership contexts (Airini et al., 2011; O'Connor, 2023).

Therefore, it is important to discover how Saudi women in academic leadership positions in Saudi Arabia are faring in the context of the Vision 2030 developments.

1.2. Saudi women

The empowerment of women has been a global objective since at least the second wave of modern feminism in the 1970s, albeit with more progress in some parts of the world than others (Verger et al., 2016). Gender equality, however, is still far from being achieved in most parts of the world. Women in Saudi Arabia have encountered gender differences in the opportunities presented to them across various professional domains; indeed, male predominance and gender segregated buildings are social and cultural characteristics that have contributed to this inequity (Abalkhail, 2017).

Nevertheless, this increases the important role of Vision 2030 goals to reform women's rights and rebalance society in terms of opportunities and work for both sexes, although these changes may increase the occurrence of new challenges - or indeed reduce any previous ones. In addition, on the other hand, changes provide women with new opportunities, and authorities that may influence their capacity to carry out their roles - in leadership as well as more generally.

A way of exploring this can be achieved through the concept of self-efficacy, which has been defined by Bandura (1999) as a person's sense of their own abilities which would have a positive or negative impact in achieving tasks (Skaalvik, 2020). Low and high

self-efficacy might consequently influence a leader's decisions, goal setting, planning, and motivations. In addition, the organisation as a factor can influence one's behaviours as self-efficacy classifies these into categories of 'responsive' and 'unresponsive'. The level of an organisation's responsiveness has a significant influence on how leaders perform their goals.

Furthermore, leadership self-efficacy has been the subject of numerous investigations (Isaac et al., 2012; Montas-Hunter, 2012; Hagan & Olivier, 2022). As an example, a study by Montas-Hunter (2012) focused on Latina women leaders' self-efficacy. By employing self-efficacy theory, it was found that a significant factor in their success as leaders was the women's higher level of self-efficacy, in comparison to men. Additionally, leadership self-efficacy development requires an understanding of one's own identity, according to the study's findings.

In higher education, it has been suggested that Saudi women's leadership self-efficacy may be enhanced by a supportive environment that encourages inclusion, equal opportunity, and responsiveness (Alfaraidy, 2021; (von Alberti-Alhtaybat & Aazam, 2018). Conversely, leadership self-efficacy may be adversely affected by an unresponsive environment. An unresponsive atmosphere can reinforce existing hurdles and perpetuate gender prejudices, resulting in lower levels of self-efficacy among Saudi women in higher education (Alsubhi et al., 2018).

This study therefore aims to investigate the self-efficacy of Saudi women academic leaders in higher education, to explore the sources of their leadership self-efficacy, beliefs, organisations and their leadership styles. In addition, the study aims to examine the effectiveness of leadership self-efficacy in an in-depth way, by applying a qualitative approach that will be presented later.

1.3. Researcher's personal story

One of the factors that inspired me to conduct and investigate this thesis was my own personal story. I am an ambitious Saudi woman born in a family that encourages and loves education and dreams of seeing their daughter in an inspiring future - but also born into a culture which believes that protecting women means offering limited opportunities, in a world where men should be responsible for them. The contradiction between the two

worlds that I have occupied (my family house and the job market) guided me to ask more about why women cannot have the full authorities and opportunities equal to men. After I finished my bachelor's degree, I joined a bank to work. This bank has more than 100 branches in Saudi Arabia, and each branch has two sections (women and men). In the women's sections, we serve only women, and we do not have a variety in terms of higher job promotions compared to men. Thus, the maximum promotion is to branch manager, regional manager, and branch network manager. All of the above roles are vertical administrative functions with extended authority over female branches only. On the other side, men have a wealth of opportunities in different departments of the bank, such as law, media, funding, sales, marketing, IT, human resources, etc. That was okay according to the Saudi local culture - but it was not okay for me. I just felt that I could not work or move from branches to any other departments, and I could not get further financial advantage due to the limited positions on offer to women. However, fortunately, everything suddenly changed, and after the announcement of Vision 2030 in 2016 (Alharbi, 2022). I was so happy to finally feel freedom, equity, and abundance. Nevertheless, most of the male colleagues were not happy and said that "you will not succeed as women, and you will miss us a lot; you cannot do it alone". Inside myself, I believed they were upset because they felt threatened by the qualified and able women. But what happened is that when women have new roles with full authorities in different departments in the bank, the work has become more chaotic, delays in transactions are high, errors are higher, communication is weaker, and this has affected the services we used to provide in branches. Unfortunately, what men were saying is true, but again, it was not the full facts; it was not the truth. I cannot have a certain answer about the reasons for the differences in performance between men and women, but it can be interpreted by different answers. For example, a lack of emotional and technical preparations for women to lead, lack of visible image for women leaders, and the glass ceiling where women believe they cannot perform effectively compared to men due to social and cultural perceptions.

This situation motivated me to understand women's behaviour in leadership; I need to know what influences their behaviour negatively or positively. I want to know why women are afraid of showing their high capabilities and why they still believe that they cannot be

better than men or equal to them. What are their beliefs, and what are the factors that influence their behaviours? I want to still be proud to be a woman through a deep understanding of women's challenges, behaviours, and efficiency.

Additionally, this led to an examination of the study's broader significance within the context of academic literature, as detailed below.

1.4. Significance of this study

As it has been outlined, Vision 2030 came with considerable decisions to set a transformational plan that may change and improve the reality for Saudi women; for example, allowing women to drive cars (Alharbi, 2022). In addition, Vision 2030 increases expectations from the Saudi higher education system to be part of the economy, by reducing the dependency on oil as income for the country and increasing incomes from other sources (Alotaibi & Campbell, 2022). These significant changes have increased the needs of research to investigate this phase for Saudi women in higher education.

Moreover, the current changes in various aspects of life and culture include women's empowerment in positions that were previously limited to men (Alharbi, 2022). Therefore, most of the Saudi studies before the announcement of Vision 2030 in 2016, discussed Saudi women's barriers and challenges in academic positions (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Alsubaihi, 2016; Kattan, 2015; Thompson, 2015). The aforementioned scholars' findings focused on the social, cultural, organisational and personal barriers that hinder Saudi women from having leadership positions with full authority. Furthermore, some of the studies conducted after Vision 2030 continued to focus on the difficulties and barriers as an example (Al-Qahtani et al., 2021; Alsharif, 2018; Almathami et al., 2022; Tameem, 2019). However, few studies thus far have discussed women's empowerment and opportunities (see for example Hodges, 2017; Havril, 2019; Gazzaz, 2017; Alsharif, 2018). Therefore, understanding the experiences and behaviour of women in leadership roles is crucial. Most of the previous studies that have been mentioned above focus on explaining and exploring what women have faced, and how those barriers have been lifted to empower them. Nevertheless, this study looks at women who were in the middle of the two phases: those who potentially went from a place of struggles - to one of

empowerment and opportunity. It investigates their behaviour, beliefs, the influence of the organisations around them, and any new developments or changes.

Moreover, employing self-efficacy theory is useful where Bandura (1999) developed the concept of self-efficacy as a central tenet of social cognition theory (Tian et al., 2019). This is described as the belief in one's capacity to carry out the actions necessary to achieve one's goals (Murphy, 2016; Moran et al., 2021). In addition, when an individual has a high level of self-efficacy, their chances of successfully attaining their goals over the long run are increased (Tian et al., 2019; Justus et al., 2023). Additionally, Spagnola (2022) emphasised the significance of applying self-efficacy theory in the face of changes caused by time, systems, policies, and the economy and impact upon academic leaders, as highlighted in his research (Brinkmann et al., 2021). Furthermore, Dwyer (2019) focused on a person's sense of self-efficacy and how it influences their aspirations to be a leader, as well as how it translates into their actions as a leader – these are fascinating areas of study that have obvious and valuable applications in the real world.

However, in the Saudi Arabian context, there is a need to comprehend how this theory can help to unpack the leadership of women from a variety of perspectives, and there is a particular knowledge deficit regarding the theory's application.

Moreover, the importance of conducting this research can be further elucidated from a variety of perspectives, including leadership self-efficacy in the Saudi literature, and the methodology and significance of the current Saudi Change Vision 2030.

1.4.1 The significance of leadership self-efficacy in Saudi women's literature

Within the Saudi Arabian context, numerous studies which mirror those conducted internationally, have identified self-efficacy as a key factor in empowering women and enhancing their leadership performance (see for example Al-Qahtani et al., 2021; Alotaibi, 2020; Al Reshidi, 2019). such findings have found that self-efficacy influences women's aspiration to leadership positions, and their ability to overcome difficulties and challenges in their roles.

Moreover, Alfrayan, (2014) found that employing self-efficacy theory on understanding Saudi women is vital. She was curious to understand Saudi businesswomen's development over time. Alfrayan (2014) employed Bandura's self-efficacy as a framework (1989) to examine the development of leadership skills among professionals and businesswomen in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia over a span of two generations. She found that there are social and educational factors which enhance women's self-efficacy: for instance, a father's role in encouraging his daughter, and studying abroad. On the other hand, the factors hindering Saudi women were found to be the lack of Saudi women's visibility in leadership roles, and a lack of role-models. In addition, Alfrayan (2014) stated that self-efficacy as a theory helped to underpin her study and enable an in-depth understanding of several factors which influenced her sample.

Furthermore, Al-Qahtani et al. (2021) explored the role of self-esteem and self-efficacy in women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia. According to the findings, self-efficacy is the most influential predictor of overall women's empowerment, followed by self-esteem. In addition, according to the study, the findings may contribute to the realisation of the 2030 KSA Vision for women's empowerment, by facilitating the development of programmes which empower women in Saudi Arabia.

Thus, using self-efficacy theory to understand Saudi women in academic leadership roles can help us better understand women in the context of the region's current and ongoing transformation.

1.4.2. The significance of methodology

Employing the qualitative approach in investigating leadership self-efficacy is significant, especially with the high number of quantitative research studies that measure self-efficacy (Özdemir et al., 2020; Baroudi & Hojeij, 2020; Bracht et al., 2021). Through the use of qualitative approaches which involve narrative construction and self-reflection, additional insight may be gained. The limitation of research on the sources of self-efficacy, as pointed out by Usher and Pajaras (2009), underscores the necessity for caution when interpreting a study's findings. The operationalisation and assessment of these sources

have not fully captured their complexity, indicating the need for a more comprehensive approach to understanding self-efficacy. In addition, the viewpoints expressed by the participants offer invaluable opportunities to assess the significance and effectiveness of leadership competencies (Ahmad et al., 2019; Jackson, 2020). Qualitative research facilitates an in-depth investigation into the origins of self-efficacy through an examination of the emotions, experiences, and perspectives of individuals. This enables more comprehensive comprehension of the elements that impact beliefs regarding one's own capabilities.

1.4.3. The significance of the current Saudi change

Under the current change due to Vision 2030, the desire to understand how to effectively apply women's empowerment in higher education has increased. In addition, in light of the proposed and ongoing changes, it is imperative to examine the manner in which women encounter this environment, the extent to which they perceive these modifications, and the determinants that impact their capacity to execute their occupations with the highest level of effectiveness.

There is consensus regarding the difficulties Saudi women have faced while pursuing leadership positions in higher education, and how those difficulties may have affected their capacity (Alotaibi, 2020; Abalkhail, 2017). Therefore, the implications and findings of this research will contribute to a deeper comprehension of the significance of women's personal beliefs in facilitating their transition into new leadership roles, and the function of sources which promote participants' leadership self-efficacy.

1.5. Research questions

The research question that guided the study was: *What shapes the self-efficacy and leadership styles of Saudi women leaders in higher education?* From this question, this study will look at:

1. To what extent are sources of leadership self-efficacy (experiences, training, Influence of emotions, verbal effect) available to Saudi academic women leaders in their workplace, from their perspective?
2. How do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?
3. How do the environmental work types (responsiveness, unresponsiveness, and

semi-responsiveness) influence Saudi academic women's leaders' leadership styles?

1.6. Rationale of this study

My own life experience has propelled the writing of this thesis. As a researcher, I have had experience working in the Saudi environment both before and after Vision 2030. As a woman, I have had dreams and ambitions to be promoted to higher positions, but there were limited opportunities due to the gender segregated buildings that allow for one binary gender only to lead, and another only to be delegated to (men have authority and women have been delegated by men). However, after announcing Vision 2030, the opportunities in my previous work expanded to encompass women, but the productivity and level of quality in responses were lower, and other issues had increased compared with the previous (male) leadership. For example, the workplace experienced low response rates and lengthy wait times that extended to days, whereas these problems could have been resolved in the shortest possible time. Furthermore, numerous issues remained unresolved as a result of inadequate responses. Insufficient expertise in problem-solving and mentoring was apparent. I was therefore motivated to understand women's experience in leadership positions and what influences their performance. Furthermore, Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia has made a huge and sudden shift in women's empowerment (Rizvi & Hussain, 2022). As an example, the decision to allow women to drive cars was announced suddenly in 2016, after long years of convincing women that culture and religion are the reason for such a ban, and that this was for their own protection and benefit (Saleh & Malibari, 2021). Therefore, according to the researcher's own personal experience, women's behaviour may be influenced by all of the stereotype claims that have created difference between men and women, in turn affecting their rights and equity. However, to understand the issue of leadership behaviour, this in-depth study explores women's leadership self-efficacy in their current jobs, which focuses on academic positions in public universities in Riyadh.

1.7. Contribution to knowledge

This research aims to examine the leadership self-efficacy of Saudi women academic leaders in higher education. Therefore, the study contributes to the research field from various perspectives:

- Understanding the issues that face women in Saudi Arabia, in observing that there is a growing body work on this, but very little specifically on the position of women leaders in higher education. This in turn should offer something new to studies in higher education on leadership and specifically women's leadership.
- It also benefits in the understanding of Saudi women's issues as part of cultural and policy changes and their potential impact on the ground.
- Applying this theory in a field where it has been used before - but in a social and organisational context where it has not been used before - may provide new understandings as to how/ whether it helps us to understand self-efficacy.
- Applying a qualitative approach can support a profound understanding of leadership self-efficacy as perceived by women and influenced by their personal experiences.

1.8. The purpose of this study

The purpose of this qualitative research is to understand and investigate the leadership self-efficacy of Saudi women in academic positions. This approach employs people's everyday experiences as a source of meaning and explores "why" questions rather than "what" questions to explain the phenomenon of society (Ahmad et al., 2019). The methodology of this study implements the social theory approach by implementing self-efficacy theory. In qualitative research, theory is useful or practical and applied because it allows for interpretation of the underlying social and psychological processes that may help to "explain" the results, rather than just describing the data (Meyer & Ward, 2014). The method that has been employed to collect the data is semi-structured interviews. Ahlin (2019) argues that semi-structured interviews offer a wealth of obtainable

information. The sample for this study consists of eighteen department heads and deans from four different institutions in Riyadh. The analysis was thematically driven by theory, supporting the understanding of the themes and their relation to the main theory's core components, with the help of literature reviews. Lastly, the research examined numerous elements in the resultant description to determine their impact on participants' leadership self-efficacy and, consequently, the leadership style they employ.

1.9. Scope of the study

Several factors need to be considered when assessing the limitations and scope of this study. First, as implied by the thesis's title, the study has focused only on women who worked in managerial academic positions. An investigation into the self-efficacy of Saudi women in leadership roles will be the exclusive focus of the study's scope. The researcher's personal experiences, as indicated in both the study's rationale and conclusion sections, motivated the focus on a sample comprised solely of women. Furthermore, the sample was collected from Riyadh city because I am familiar with the city and it is the area where I live and studied for my Master's degree. However, the sample was collected from four different universities and different departments, which will be illustrated in the methodology chapter.

There are further demographic factors that have an impact on the scope of the current investigation, those being: position of the respondent, their qualifications, gender, and the fact that the sample was taken from respondents working for governmental universities.

1.10. Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of nine chapters which are presented as below:

Chapter One introduction: This presents a summary of the main aims for undertaking this research, along with the focus of the research and the research questions. In addition, this research provides significance and purpose, as well as highlighting its contribution to knowledge and the potential impact of the researcher's professional and personal interests.

Chapter two: This is the first part of the literature reviews which will focus on Saudi Arabia, Saudi women and Saudi higher education. As this study investigated Saudi women in academia, this research presents their history, culture, and more about their higher education system, challenges and benefits. This chapter will include Saudi scholars' names such as Al-Ahmadi (2011) and Abalkhail (2017).

Chapter three: Where the conceptual framework of this thesis is illustrated. This chapter employs self-efficacy theory that was established by Bandura in 1977. This chapter will provide an in-depth explanation to enable a deeper understanding of self-efficacy, leadership self-efficacy, and women's leadership self-efficacy. Additionally, it will discuss and outline how the theory has been employed.

Chapter four: This study's main goal is to understand leaders' behaviour. This chapter presents the relative literature reviews of leadership. For example, leadership styles, organisations and women in leadership roles. A number of scholarly research will be presented such as that conducted by Fuller (2014) and Campuzano (2019).

Chapter five: Discusses the methodology, methods, participants, pilot study and ethical considerations.

Chapter six: This includes an analysis and findings related to the first research question, which focuses on self-efficacy sources.

Chapter seven: This chapter presents an analysis and discussion related to self-efficacy beliefs.

Chapter eight: This will focus on explaining the findings that relate to the organisation and leadership styles.

Chapter nine: The conclusion chapter presents a summary of the findings, along with any implications and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Saudi women and their leadership

2. Introduction

Saudi Arabia is a country known for its rich cultural heritage and deeply rooted traditions (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). With the Vision 2030 initiative, the Kingdom has initiated a journey of modernisation and transformation in recent years. The primary objective of this endeavour has been to introduce variety into the Saudi economy and enable all citizens, women included, to engage actively in a range of sectors (Hakiem, 2022; Abalkhail, 2017). The realm of higher education has received considerable interest and made significant progress. In spite of the efforts made by the Saudi government to promote gender equality, Saudi women who are pursuing higher education confront a variety of distinct obstacles and problems that may impede their advancement, such as lack of training and experience (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017).

This thesis aims to examine the role of self-efficacy in the leadership of Saudi women. In order to have an in-depth comprehension, it is necessary to delve into the history of Saudi women and explore how this contributes to the development of their self-efficacy. Hence, the objective of this literature review is to identify the chronological stages that Saudi women have undergone. Furthermore, it aims to showcase higher education and explore Saudi women's present role in leadership within this field.

Therefore, this chapter will be presented in two main sections. The first one is the background of historical phases, and the second one is the higher education background, as shown in the following diagram:

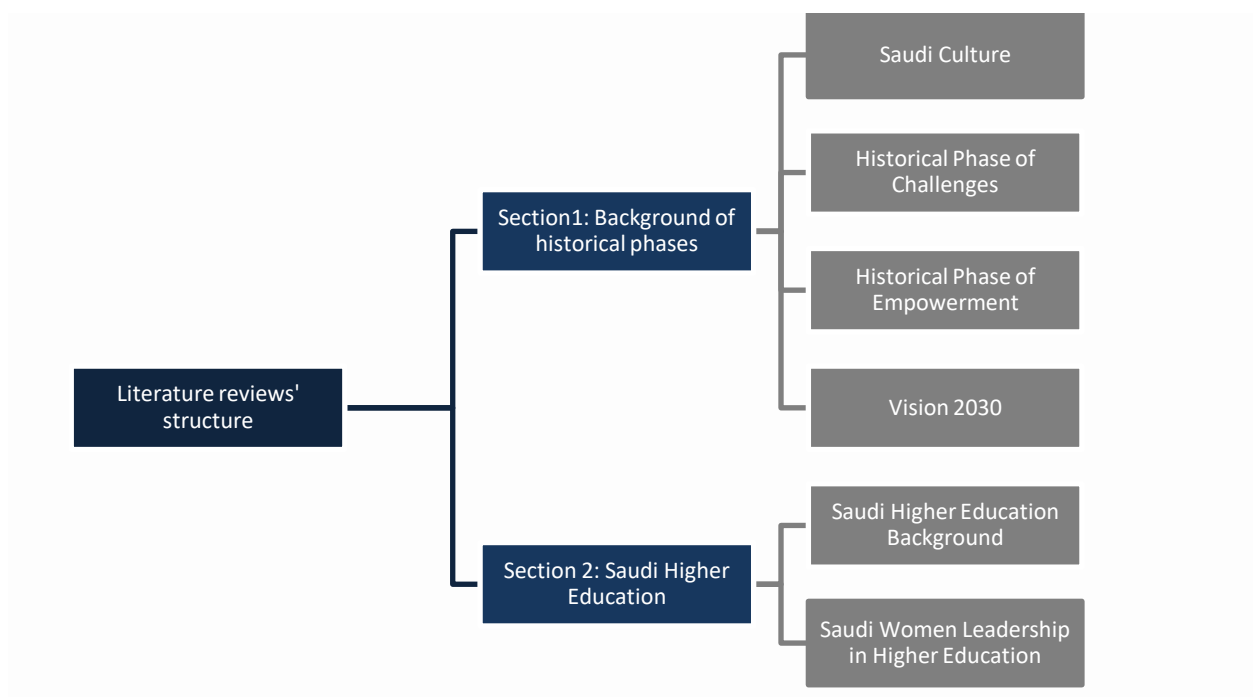


Figure 1: Literature reviews' structure.

The first main section is the background of historical phases, which will provide insight into Saudi culture, including its aspects and the ways in which religious and economic movements influence it. Furthermore, the challenges that influenced Saudi women in one of the historical phases are called Al Sahwa. Then, the paper will present how history, on the other hand, contributed to support for the image and privileges of Saudi women in their society by introducing how each Saudi king has an influence on that. At the end of this main section, the paper will present transformational growth related to Saudi women's current history and explain how it will impact them. Understanding Saudi women's history improves an understanding of their leadership self-efficacy.

Moreover, the second main section focuses on introducing Saudi higher education and will discuss the position of Saudi women leaders in this field.

2.1. First section: background of historical phases

2.2. Saudi culture

Culture is part of anthropology, which is the study of human behaviours. It is concerned with the association between culture and behaviour, and how culture develops over time (Weisgrau et al., 2023). This section focuses on Saudi culture and how it plays important

factors in the progression or retrogression of Saudi women and how this affects their ability regarding decision making in the workplace.

Saudi culture is a mixture of Arab history and Islamic values that emerged and formed after Islam entered the Arabian Peninsula in 600 (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). One of the most popular of these values is generosity; Arab history has witnessed stories of pride regarding Arab generosity to strangers (Alsaggaf, 2004). When the Islamic religion came, it strengthened this quality and developed it in many respects, making it obligatory for men to spend on women, even if they were not rich. This type of culture has evolved, and it has become a priority for men to work, rather than women. Men have responsibilities towards the economy and this culture has led to events like the Gulf war in Kuwait in 1990, Iraq in 2003, and falling oil prices in different years including 1986, 1997 and 2008, which is the main source of the country's economy (Jones, 2010). Therefore, the cultural perception towards women's work affected the opportunities of Saudi women in both work and schools.

The Saudi government has played a role in influencing such a culture, especially at the beginning of the country's education dissemination. In Saudi Arabia, the number of girls' schools has expanded in large areas of both cities and villages (Alharbi, 2023). In addition, there was a lot of encouragement for Saudi women to find jobs as teachers in girls' schools. As a result, Saudi culture's attitude toward the importance of women's work and study changed (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991). As an example of this, through my family for three generations, my grandmother did not have the opportunity to be educated because the culture believed that it was not important for her as a woman. It was more important at that time to stay at home and support her family in housework. The second generation, which was my mother's, did not have education because of the number of schools and the lack of transportation. However, some girls in my mother's community got this opportunity because of the support of their parents. The third generation of my family, which includes myself and my sisters, were motivated by my mother to get an education. It was considered a right that we should not give up, because of the benefits that it brings, such as empowerment in society. Hence, the culture of education and employment for Saudi women has evolved over generations and the growth of the

economy; there are now more opportunities for both sexes to be entitled to work and education. More details will be presented in the section relating to Saudi women's history.

2.3. Collectivism culture

Moreover, one of Saudi's society characteristics is collectivism, which defined by AlSheddi et al. (2019) where society merges into a set of moments of birth and shares an advantage and loyalty amongst its citizens. Alotaibi and Campbell (2022) suggest that collectivism exists in Saudi culture due to two factors: firstly, the nature of society and the idea of belonging to tribes; secondly, the influence of the Islamic religion, which strengthened the idea of communication with neighbours. Such values have encouraged some members of Saudi society to communicate with each other, being interested in the perception of society. However, although this aspect is considered to be an advantage for any other society, it may in fact be an obstacle or a disadvantage for Saudi women. In previous times, Saudi women were unable to obtain educational opportunities or work in administrative positions due to society's view of the stereotypical image of women and the importance of their presence and role in the home, not work. There was a view of non-acceptance if women received an education or if they entered specialties belonging to men instead of women, such as engineering or medicine (Omair, 2019). In the 1990s, this was related to the Sahwa movement, which will be outlined later (Alhazmi, 2022). Therefore, such a notion has left women missing some of the opportunities they are qualified for. On the other hand, this type of view can be positive and motivate a growth of opportunities for Saudi women, as this has led to the vulnerability of their peers who have received golden opportunities and who have been able to create positive paths for the direction of women in work and education. This has led to the growth that Saudi women are currently witnessing, their ability to have different opportunities, and their chance to prove their competencies.

The cultural barriers faced by Saudi women were not the only obstacle to their dreams; the Sahwa movement further complicated matters by equating Islam—a socially esteemed religion—with fanaticism and extremism, which in turn impacted women's rights and everyday life (Alhazmi, 2022). Understanding the beginning, impact, and conclusion of this awakening is crucial, particularly as we present this research in the context of a transformative moment and the 2030 vision.

2.4. Historical phase of challenges “sahwa movement”

Messenger Mohammed, peace be upon on him, confirmed the rights of women in Islam through his saying “Women are the twin halves of men”. However, Saudi women faced traditional difficulties, and one of the most severe obstacles was the mandatory presence of a guardian (Abalkhail, 2019). There was also a cultural philosophy that women needed the support of men, and that support was represented by material, protection, and many other duties, which led to the existence of the guardianship law. The significant reason for this philosophy was the birth of the Sahwa movement (Al Alhareth et al., 2015).

Unfortunately, this culture has left its traces on women's work environments. It created stereotypes in Saudi culture and even influenced the culture of Saudi workplaces. In particular, Saudi women at work believe that they belong to men even if the men are less qualified (Abalkhail, 2017). Saudi culture has influenced the concept of women's work in the working environment where women now believe that they are present as just a support for men (Hamdan, 2005). This, as it has been mentioned, is as a result of the Sahwa movement (Alhazmi, 2022; Alzahrani, 2023).

In 1979, an incident happened which instigated the Al Sahwa movement, which involved Juhayman al-Otaibi, the leader. During his occupation of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, he imprisoned worshippers and demanded that they adhere to Islamic principles and seek justice according to his views. Such an incident made the Saudi government a major threat to its international relations (Alzahrani, 2023). Sahwa ideology evolved from an intellectual religious doctrine to political movements that were occasionally extremist and even terroristic in nature (Alhazmi, 2022). Since 2014, Saudi Arabia has classified the organisation as a terrorist one due to the fact that it promotes and endorses violent means to enforce its political and religious doctrine, in addition to the incidents that occurred inside Saudi Arabia. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Sahwa movement was at its height, and its strict religious discourse had a significant impact on society's actions and ideas while receiving little criticism. The religious police have been established to regulate any social conduct that contradicts its principles. However, subsequent to the 9/11 assaults on the United States, where extremist ideology was heavily criticised, the organisation started to lose strength. Beginning in May 2003, terrorist attacks also occurred in Saudi Arabia (Hamad, 2017; Alzahrani, 2023).

The purpose of addressing the concept of Al Sahwa in this thesis is to explore the self-efficacy of Saudi women. It is crucial to examine the challenges, beliefs, and societal norms that have influenced and shaped women's experiences. Specifically, the historical path of Saudi women has undergone a significant change since Vision 2030 was implemented. This study will pursue self-efficacy and gain a more profound understanding of women's leadership self-efficacy and how it relates to their workplace and their leadership skills.

A study by Alhazmi (2022) titled "The Sahwa Has Fallen" presented the various stages that led to the country's extreme gender segregation:

- *Wall in between*: the presence of wall insulators inside and outside the house so that it is forbidden even for the neighbour who is in a house on the second floor to see his neighbour's house. This requires closing the curtains and windows or the presence of a long wall, in addition to separating male guests from women and building two living rooms for hospitality according to gender.
- *Invisible women*: this point is related to the appearance of the woman through what she wears when she goes out of the house; the outer clothing should be a loose cloak and must cover her face and she should not go out alone. She should be accompanied by a man who is one of her relatives. The exit of the woman alone was considered behaviour outside the values of Al Sahwa.
- *Female privacy*: the concept of privacy was completely confined to the direction of the woman; she cannot share her phone number even with public institutions but rather shares the number of a man who is a relative. She also considers knowing the names of women in public as sisters and wives as a disclosure of privacy.
- *Only for women*: this represents the unified logo of buildings that have been subjected to gender segregation in public places including workplaces, universities, schools, wedding venues, hairdressers, and workplaces. Additionally, certain cafés and malls have been designed to accommodate women exclusively. No one has access to the opposite sex section.

- *Do not go to their world*: the claim that men lose some of their manly traits when they engage with women and that woman who mix with men lose some of their feminine traits is one way this language manipulates and controls people. One-way women can avoid this is by not mixing with males.
- *Neediness*: this describes the exception to the cause of mixing where new societal reasons have emerged to advocate it. In response to this, mixing is allowed within limits under this term, such as in the medical field, in volunteer work, in exhibitions, and other areas where gender roles are more important.

A discussion about how Saudi women will be prepared is always raised because the world used to know about Saudi women from the Sahwa's movement principles. However, Saudi women's history is more than this hard historical period. Saudi women have made progress throughout history, despite facing numerous cultural and historical obstacles (Alharbi, 2023). Decisions made during each reign of the king have consistently backed the present findings, proving that Saudi women today have excellent qualifications and should be granted greater empowerment (Alharbi, 2023; Alharbi, 2021; Al-Ahmadi, 2011). The following section will provide further details on historical work against the Sahwa movement.

2.5. Historical phase of empowerment

Saudi women have worked in business/management administration and have worked with the development of education in Saudi Arabia, which qualified them for positions of power. The importance of education in Saudi Arabia did not contradict the values of Islam, which led to the spread of schools and their expansion (Alrowaithy, 2018). Women in Saudi Arabia have been enrolled in education and have had access to senior management for nearly 76 years, from when the first girls' school was established in 1947 under King Saud. The school was opened in his palace to avoid the reaction of a society that refused to educate women because of traditional customs and traditions (Almutairi, 2019).

2.6. King Faisal's era (1964 to 1975)

In 1956, King Faisal's role came with the support and encouragement of his wife, Princess

Effat, to establish an independent school for girls (segregated from boys) in the western region of Saudi Arabia to keep up with the culture of Saudi society and encourage parents to educate their daughters (Almutairi, 2019).

Women's education in King Faisal's time followed society's culture and was smoothly encouraged. However, in his age, scholarships were given to men, not women, according to the Saudi traditions, which only expect men to be responsible and travel alone. However, there is a great example of Prof. Fatina Amin Shaker, who appealed to King Faisal by asking for a scholarship, and he supported her. This made her the first Saudi woman to get her PhD from the USA in 1971 (Hamdan, 2005).

2.7. King Fahd's era (1982- 2005)

King Fahd was appointed Minister of Education before he was a king (1953-1960). An independent women's section in the ministry was established to support girls' education. It facilitated more opportunities for the Saudi women workforce (Alzahrani, 2017).

During King Fahd's reign, the number of Saudi schools and universities increased significantly, from 3283 in 1969 to 22770 in 1999. This increase was primarily attributed to the significant growth in the number of Saudi students in public schools, which rose from 547,000 to 4.8 million (Al Saud, 2018). The empowerment of Saudi women has been significantly influenced by the expansion of institutions and education levels. An indication of this heightened awareness may be the demands made by women to exercise their right to drive vehicles, a right that, although it was not achieved at the time, may be associated with empowerment at the educational level (Alzahrani, 2017).

2.8. King Abdullah's era (2005-2015)

Al Assaf (2019) argues that under the rule of King Abdullah (2005), the situation for women had vastly improved, because there was a new and encouraging shift towards women taking up leadership positions. King Abdullah provided opportunities for scholarships for all segments of society at all ages and levels, with an increase in scholarships (413%) during his ten years of rule. The Saudi government aimed to develop and open the eyes of its society to the outside world through campaigns of scholarship,

which reduced societal restrictions on the development of women and supported them to be highly efficient (Al Assaf, 2019).

In 2008, he established the first independent women's university (Princess Noora bin Abdulrahman University) and appointed the first woman president of the University, Princess Al-Jawhara Al Saud. The University has more than 14 departments in different disciplines that support women's work in the labour market. Under King Abdullah's rule, there were many announcements for the appointment of women to leadership positions. In particular, Noura al-Fayez was appointed in 2009 as the first woman to serve as Deputy Minister of Education for the girls' department (Al-Rashdi & Abdelwahed, 2022)

In 2011, women's right to vote and stand for election to municipal councils was announced, which had previously been an area exclusively for men (Almutairi, 2019). King Abdullah continued to encourage Saudi women and one of the most important steps in this was the appointment of 30 Saudi women in the Shuraa Council, which is considered to be of high importance in raising any decisions or changes in the development of Saudi society (Almutairi, 2019). The Shuraa council studies the distorted Saudi society and votes on solutions and submits them to the king directly. King Abdullah appointed successful, leading and inspiring women, such as Dr Hayat Sindi, who was the first Saudi scholarship student to study biotechnology, and Dr Soraya Al Obaid, who served as executive director of the United Nations Fund and was an activist in human issues (Khutani, 2018).

King Abdullah died in 2015, and the country was left with deep sadness for all the humanitarian and paternal support of Saudi women and society. King Abdullah indeed contributed to the transfer of women from routine procedural positions to those of decision-making positions (Khutani, 2018).

2.9. King Salman's era (2015-present)

King Salman took office after the death of King Abdullah in 2015 and is the current ruler of Saudi Arabia (Almutairi, 2019). His time has so far has witnessed strong decisions to empower women, the most important of which was granting women the right to drive cars

in 2017 (Almutairi, 2019). Alharbi (2022) observes that under King Salman's rule, Vision 2030 has been adopted, which aims to expand the kingdom's economy from oil to other resources. In addition, he aims to increase the female workforce in the Saudi labour market. This will be presented in detail under the section discussing Vision 2030.

All of the previous sections in this chapter discussed Saudi culture and the Sahwa movement, as well as how this affects the constraints on and obstacles to Saudi women's development and rights. However, the chapter also delved into the process of empowering women through education, professional opportunities, and their historical inclusion. Saudi women are currently in a pivotal stage known as Vision 2030, which demands they be highly prepared, possess all skills, and be free from all intellectual restrictions that hinder their growth. This new phase has spurred the completion of this thesis and enhanced the exploration into leadership self-efficacy. However, first, the following section will present Vision 2030 and discuss its implications for Saudi higher education and for Saudi women in higher education.

2.10. Historical phase of new change Vision 2030 (2016-current)

Vision 2030 underscores the imperative for tangible advancements in the societal standing of women within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Historical records indicate that Saudi women have encountered obstacles that have hindered their ability to participate on an equal ground with men in leadership or authoritative positions (Alharbi, 2022; Alotaibi, 2020). This highlights the importance of explicitly identifying women's rights as a primary objective within the transformation plan.

Achieving this objective will have far-reaching consequences, one of which being the advancement of many Saudi women to prominent positions in government (Abdullah Dahlan, 2023). Positions held by Saudi women for the first time in history can shed light on their growth and empowerment. These include political roles like ambassadorships, roles in human rights and the Shura Council, and roles in sports departments. In addition to positions in the education sector, for example, the government appointed Dr. Ohood Al Shuhail as the first female head of department in the College of Media at King Saud University to manage both gendered sections (men and women) (Alturki, 2021). There

has also been an increase in the number of female Saudis appointed to the roles of department heads and deans in both the men's and women's divisions (Albajali, 2023; Alharbi, 2023; Parveen, 2023; Rizvi & Hussain, 2022; Abdullah Dahlan, 2023).

Despite this, however, some Saudi researchers continue to contend that the level of women's empowerment in higher education has not yet achieved its intended level (Alharbi, 2023; Abdullah Dahlan, 2023). Detailed discussion of Saudi women's participation in higher education will follow, but for now, this research will centre on the legislative shifts brought about by Vision 2030, which elevates the position of Saudi women.

2.11. Legal reforms and changes following Vision 2030 to advance Saudi women's empowerment

Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia has improved the situation for Saudi women in the workplace and empowered them in positions which were previously barred to women. All of this has required several steps and changes.

2.11.1. Law reform

One of the significant elements Saudi women needed in order to expand and grow was their freedom of movement. That freedom was restricted by two laws:

- Travel was forbidden without guardianship approval.
- Forbidden to drive.

However, this law has been completely cancelled in 2019 and Saudi women at age 18 are now able to make their own decisions toward driving, travelling, studying abroad and issuing their official documents without any guardianship (Alshalawi, 2020).

In addition, Alhajri (2020) points out that the vision of 2030 in Saudi Arabia and the positive changes that have occurred to Saudi women through taking a number of positions and enabling them to drive and travel without the consent of the guardian, led to a generation more aware of the future and women's rights, opening women's voices to discuss all matters about women in the newspapers, social media or the Shura Council.

Furthermore, a change in the law would be to guarantee that neither gender is dominant and to provide women the same rights as men in the legal profession. Because of this, the percentage of female solicitors increased significantly, reaching nearly 100%, compared to the previous percentage in this field. A number of reforms concerning the rights of Saudi women have also been implemented, such as the prohibition of forced marriage and the legalisation of alimony during marriage and after divorce, protections for women's inheritance rights, and an end to forced marriage (Parveen, 2023; Rizvi & Hussain, 2022).

2.11.2. Motivate and encourage women for leadership roles

A culture, an economy, and a society that is completely managed by men has male dominance in all fields as part of social norms. Therefore, to improve the status of Saudi women in leadership roles, the government launched initiatives that promote and encourage women to move towards those leadership positions, where they will be the first faces of their generation to break the ice and stereotypes that society has been accustomed to. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development established eleven initiatives to help Saudi women in this transformative shift (Alessa et al., 2022; Women's Empowerment Initiatives, 2020). One initiative to empower women in the civil service and enhance their leadership role aims to ensure equal opportunities between the sexes and help women hold senior structural leadership positions in government agencies through a set of supporting projects; it works as a tool for the National Platform for Women Leaders. Additionally, there is an initiative that supports inclusiveness and diversity in the labour market to create stimulating environments for women. There is also a Leadership Training and Mentoring Initiative that aims to train 1,700 women annually from different sectors. Also, there are other initiatives that support the work-life balance for women, such as "Woosol" for easy transportations and "Quraa" for childcare (Women's Empowerment Initiatives, 2020; Parveen, 2023).

2.11.3. Increasing women's visibility in various sectors

Women in Saudi Arabia were underrepresented in most fields because of cultural norms, as previously indicated. Vision 2030 was very much concerned with understanding the presence and function of women and emphasising this vital fact. There are fields where

women have few positions of power, such as education; fields where Saudi women are a minority, such as the economy; and fields where women play no role at all, such as sports.

Regarding the economy, the Boston Consulting Group (BCG, 2020) reported assets under women's management to be valued at nearly \$225 billion, which represents the driving growth in the region ("Women in the Middle East will soon hold \$1 trillion in wealth"). Therefore, Vision 2030 came with decisions to support women in the field of entrepreneurship through a number of programmes, as well as supporting leadership positions in the fields of economy and investment, such as Sarah Al Suhaimi's appointment as Chair of the Saudi Stock Exchange in 2017 and Lubna Olayan as Chairperson of SABB for three years in 2020 ("Lubna Olayan appointed Chairman of SABB", 2019; "Women in the Middle East will soon hold \$1 trillion in wealth", 2020).

In addition, lowering the unemployment rate, increasing women's participation in the labour force, and fostering the country's economic and sustainable development are also long-term goals of Vision 2030 (Alessa et al., 2022). The percentage of women working in the labour market in 2019 was 23%, while it was only 19% in 2015. It was among the goals of Vision 2030 to reach 30%, but according to the report of the Ministry of Statistics issued in 2022, unemployment decreased by 15% and the participation rate of women in work reached 37% (Parveen [2023] issued a report on Saudi women for the years 2022 and 2023).

In sports, the presence of Saudi women as audience members in stadiums was not allowed until 2018, and that again was one of the consequences of the Vision 2030 aims. Improving the strength of women's image in this field was supported by appointing princess Rima Bint Bander as Vice President of the General Sports Authority for the Women's Section. A slew of subsequent sports-related decisions has come to pass, including the granting of licences to private women's clubs and the inclusion of Saudi women in regional sports championships (Shahab et al., 2021; Fakehy et al., 2021).

In education, the status of women appeared to be better compared to other sectors. The

importance of reforms to support gender equality and rights will be explained further, but firstly the study will present the case for higher education in Saudi Arabia.

2.12. Second section: Saudi higher education background

Saudi Arabia recognised that the country's major source of revenue could no longer just be oil. As a result, Vision 2030 aims to convert Saudi Arabia into a leading worldwide model and establish a thriving economy by empowering its young, releasing their energy, and investing in their strengths (Alharbi, 2022). This vision has ramifications for the field of higher education, as it necessitates advanced skills from future generations and elevates the responsibility of higher education to revise and enhance curricula in order to cultivate essential and valuable skills demanded by employers. Furthermore, Saudi universities, which represent higher education, need to elevate their ranking to correspond with the status of other prestigious international universities (Bataineh & Aga, 2023; Bunaiyan, 2019). According to a speech by Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the vision incorporates the following objectives:

Among our commitments... an education that contributes to economic growth. We will close the gap between the outputs of higher education and the requirements of the job market. We will also help our students make careful career decisions, while at the same time training them and facilitating their transition between different educational pathways. In the year 2030, we aim to have at least five Saudi universities among the top 200 universities in international rankings. We shall help our students achieve results above international averages in global education indicators. To this end, we will prepare a modern curriculum focused on rigorous standards in literacy, numeracy, skills and character development. We will track progress and publish a sophisticated range of education outcomes, showing year-on-year improvements. We will work closely with the private sector to ensure higher education outcomes are in line with the requirements of the job market. We will invest in strategic partnerships with apprenticeship providers, new skills councils from industry, and large private companies. We will also work towards developing the job specifications of every education field. Furthermore, we will build a centralized student database tracking students from early childhood through to K-12 and beyond into tertiary education (higher and vocational) in order to improve education planning, monitoring, evaluation, and outcomes (Saudi Economic Vision, 2030: 40).

As stated above, by 2030 the Saudi government hopes to have five of its universities

ranked among the top 100 in the world, which is all part of the 2030 Vision (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). In the year 2024, the Times Higher Education Rankings assigned the following rankings to academic institutions: King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals attained a position between 201 and 250, King Abdulaziz University was positioned between 250 and 300, and King Saud University, Imam Mohammed bin Saud, and Prince Sultan University placed between 401 and 500 (The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2024, 2024). The title of the leading top university in the Arab countries has been shared by King Saud University and King Abdulaziz University since 2008 (Alzahrani, 2017). This rise in the rankings confirms what the Saudi administration already suspected: that the quantity and quality of Saudi Arabia's institutions are growing. After allocating 193 billion Saudi riyals (\$51.5 billion)—or 19% of the entire 2019 budget for education—in 2020, the government maintained its financial support to the Ministry of Education for 2024, increasing it by another 195 billion riyals (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020).

The Kingdom is the site of a significant network that includes 29 public sector universities, which collectively operate over 133 campuses, schools, and colleges, in addition to 38 private institutions (Alharbi, 2016; Saudi Private and public universities, 2023). The higher educational institutions which are privately owned and operated tend to concentrate more on specialised colleges, such as those that offer professional, medical, and general education programmes (Alharbi, 2016).

All Saudi universities are supervised by the Ministry of Education and are organised in a hierarchical system (Alzahrani, 2017). This is a system in which authority is delegated from the top down, such as the head of department being supervised by the dean, the dean being supervised by the deputy of the college, and so forth. Saudi universities are divided into two sections, one for men and the other for women. In principle, the senior management of the university is carried out by men. Males delegate authority to women to manage women's departments. This is one of the reasons why women in leadership are constrained. This will be discussed more later in this chapter.

As previously noted, there is also a women-only university called Princess Nora University in Riyadh, which has fifteen colleges (Tameem, 2019). According to Mahmoud and Aljhani (2022), the Princess Nora institution was founded in 2007 and was the world's largest university for women with an enrolment of over 52,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Despite the fact that the majority of universities have male and female faculty members, the vast majority of presidents were male. Female university presidents were only appointed if a university became exclusively female. After Vision 2030 was announced, Dr Lailic Alsafdi became President for Saudi Electronic University.

Vision 2030, as previously stated, aims to modernise Saudi Arabia's higher education system (Mohiuddin et al., 2023; Bunaiyan, 2019). Vision 2030 also aims to improve the education field through improving the curriculum, students' skills, and overall outcomes, increasing Saudi universities' global rankings, and privatising part of this sector (Vision 2030, 2016; Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). One of the recent reforms in higher education happened when the Ministry of Education (2019) indicated that Saudi Arabia has issued a regulation of the modern university system to organise higher education affairs and to enhance its scientific, research, and societal standing at the local, regional and international levels. This is intended to improve the ranking of educational institutions and raise five Saudi Arabian universities to the list of top 200 global universities by the year 2030 (Al-Olayani et al., 2021). This is in high demand due to development changes, which necessitates advanced skills and also intensifies the motivation to explore women's leadership self-efficacy in higher education.

In addition, a study by Mohiuddin et al. (2023) examined present practices and assessed the progress made from 2016 to 2020 towards achieving the higher education objectives outlined in Vision 2030. The study's findings demonstrated that reforms in higher education are indeed driven by Vision 2030. The following are the priorities of the forms, according to academic experts: educational facility; human resources and technologies; a modern curriculum; global partnerships; scientific study; academic growth; proficient alumni; accreditations; and high rankings of universities. Universities in Saudi Arabia are succeeding academically, according to data from the first evaluation (2016–2020),

through excellence and development in outputs, as well as an improvement in research quality.

Additionally, regarding university access, both undergraduate and postgraduate curricula are provided free of charge. However, due to the limited number of seats available for postgraduate studies, there exists an additional opportunity that students may obtain for a fee, albeit at a cost (Al-Tuwaijri & Kalyanaraman, 2020). Also, the Saudi government provides monthly financial aid to students attending public universities in the country (Alsulami, 2021). In addition to its guarantee of free public higher education, the King Abdullah Scholarship Programme, which was instituted in 2005 and has since been extended through various government initiatives, has awarded numerous Saudi students' scholarships to pursue studies at universities overseas.

The latest statistics by the Ministry of Education to represent the numbers of students and academic members in the public sector are listed below (Open Data, Ministry of Education, 2020):

Number	Women	Men	Total
Students in the governmental universities	713,851	583,575	1,297,426
Academic Staff in the governmental universities	29,373	38,948	68,321

Table 1: Statistics of students and academic numbers in the public sector.

The number of female students is higher than that of male students, despite the fact that there is one university exclusively for men, the Islamic University, and another university, the King Fahad University for Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM), which although is now open to women (having accepted 92 female students in 2020), was initially limited to men due to its focus on oil and engineering subjects.

Furthermore, the percentage of male academics is higher than that of females by 15%. So, nearly half of Saudi women occupy academic positions and share with men the same qualifications and experience. But, according to several studies, Saudi women still face a number of issues that limit and influence their rights to be part of the decision making and policy making in Saudi higher education (Tameem, 2019; Saleh & Malibari, 2021; Parveen, 2023; Hodges, 2017; Alsubaihi, 2016; Alsharif, 2018). The following section elaborates upon this.

2.13. Saudi women's leadership in higher education

Academic Saudi women in higher education are distinguished with high qualifications as a result of the extensive scholarship campaigns under King Abdullah's rule (2005-15) and which continue to this day (Alhumaidhi, 2015; Hakiem, 2022). According to a study from Abalkhail (2017), women in Saudi Arabian higher education have more experience and qualifications than men, but they are less likely to take on leadership roles. Al-Asfour et al. (2017) stated that Saudi women face a number of obstacles that are seen as impediments to their ambitions for leadership positions. Specifically, these have included stereotypes, insufficient potential for development (leadership positions), and freedom to travel due to the law preventing Saudi women from driving. Moreover, these obstacles might affect women's leadership self-efficacy when they are leaders, in particular because of the changing status of Saudi women.

This study aims to find out what influences women leaders' self-efficacy. In Saudi Arabia, gender segregation is considered as one of the main barriers in limiting the opportunities of women in leadership positions (Alsubaihi, 2016). Among all of the difficulties, the urgent need for change is raised by Vision 2030. However, these difficulties can be grouped into three primary areas related to gender in leadership: individual (micro level), organisational (meso level), and social (macro level) (Almujadidi et al., 2022; Almutairi, 2023).

2.14. Saudi women's challenges

Several researchers suggest that Saudi woman in higher education face various obstacles, including sexist, cultural, organisational, and personal barriers (Al-Ahmadi,

2011; Alotaibi et al., 2017).

2.15. Surrounded social image, stereotype and judges (macro level)

2.15.1. Cultural and genderism barriers:

In Saudi culture, the Prophet Muhammad mentioned women's rights in Islam by saying "Women are the halves of men", yet Saudi women have historically faced barriers (Ahmed, 2020). Cultural customs in Saudi Arabia have hindered Saudi women's access to experiences that go beyond their culturally defined duties. While Saudi culture does not explicitly prohibit women from working, it does require that their work be carried out in accordance with the principles of Islamic law, and without the accompaniment of men, which is work that is not mixed between the sexes. Regardless, Saudi culture does not disapprove of women helping males in national development projects that align with customs (non-mixed work), which influences the type of opportunities, power and experience they may have. However, many Saudi women are wary of joining the workforce due to women's widespread distrust of Saudi culture (Eger et al., 2022; Aldossari & Calvard, 2022).

Moreover, women are unable to participate in higher-paying occupations, such as leadership positions, as a result of the existence of cultural barriers. Consequently, their annual income is substantially reduced. The percentage of women in managerial positions in Saudi Arabia is significantly low, standing at 8%. Additionally, unemployment rates among women were exceedingly high prior to the establishment of Vision 2030. Even though the equality of opportunity is making progress, it has not yet reached the anticipated threshold (Abalkhail, 2017).

2.15.2. Work-life balance

The advancement of societal norms and values has expanded the responsibilities of women beyond their traditional roles as mothers and wives to include their economic, social, and occupational contributions. Nonetheless, this has resulted in married women having to concurrently fulfil two responsibilities, namely their domestic and professional obligations (Alarifi & Basahal, 2023). This creates an opportunity for complications to

emerge due to the necessity of balancing these responsibilities. Balancing their domestic and professional responsibilities presents greater obstacles for married women employed in higher education (Fritz & Van Knippenberg, 2018). More and more, married working women feel pressure to excel in all three of their roles: employee, mother, and wife. Their vulnerability is exacerbated by this pressure, which further causes discord. As a result, women in positions of leadership within the academic sector have unique challenges, especially those who are married (Al-Alawi et al., 2021). For instance, based on marital status and the number of children they have, women are frequently unable to apply for positions that necessitate extensive travel (Subbarayalu et al., 2021).

Furthermore, beyond the Saudi context, the situation is the same for women globally, where work-life balance has been identified as a barrier that restricts and diminishes the inclination to exploit opportunities for leadership (Al-Alawi et al., 2021; Alfarasani & Mohammad, 2021; Malik & Allam, 2021).

Saudi women in higher education have argued that their work-life balance was primarily determined by their husbands' perspectives on the expectations of women's roles and the degree to which men encouraged their choices (Al-Kayed, 2015).

However, a study by Alarifi and Basahal (2023) discovered that Saudi men were still influenced by social norms because they expected their wives to do all the house tasks and take responsibility for childcare. Additionally, Al-Asfour et al. (2017) raised this issue by asking the sample in their study about whether or not they had a housemaid. The responses indicated that the visa procedures are excessively lengthy, especially considering that most housemaids in Saudi Arabia come from countries such as India and the Philippines, which require specific work visas. This made it more difficult for the mother or wife to independently manage the housework without any support.

Abdullah Dahlan (2023) stated that Saudi women face additional challenges as they try to reconcile their personal and work lives. Because Saudi women are under great pressure to achieve a work-life balance, the report suggests that the Saudi Ministry of Education and all universities develop succession planning policies. Also, in light of the results of the study, it is recommended that local governments develop effective

approaches to change the traditional perspectives and attitudes of men regarding women's societal contributions and their ability to achieve significant benefits in various fields, including education.

2.15.3. Role-models and networking

Role-models and networking have been presented in various studies as significant factors to encourage individuals to aspire for leadership positions (Guenaga et al., 2022; Al Naqbi, 2023). However, this factor is missing for Saudi women in higher education, as the inability of Saudi women to attain leadership or authoritative positions will be impeded by a dearth of networks and role models (Abalkhail, 2017; Davidsson, 2022).

Numerous studies have demonstrated that communication and professional relationships are crucial components of a leadership-oriented career path. The studies highlighted that the goals of creating relationships varied between the sexes, with males building relationships strategically to gain from others, and women building relationships for friendship and social access (Tonge, 2010; Parker & Welch, 2013). In light of this, Saudi women may encounter an obstacle in the form of gender segregation in universities (Abalkhail, 2017).

The rationale, according to Mengel's (2020) research, is that males who make decisions tend to favour rewarding other men, which contradicts the idea that there are some differences in gender formation in networks. But even among women, there are cultural differences in how they view network formation, according to research by Abalkhail and Allan (2015). This research compared the experiences of female public sector managers in Saudi Arabia with those of female managers in the United Kingdom. The results showed that there were two quite distinct approaches in Saudi Arabian and British women's networking. Family is more closely associated with networking for Saudi women than professional networks. Networking, on the other hand, was seen by British women as something that happened either casually or professionally at work or within their larger professional networks. Though they were supported in various ways by their families and professional networks, both groups of women faced obstacles in their

careers. Further, according to research by Alsubaie and Jones (2017), Saudi women depend on male relatives to help them make more social contacts, which can help them grow in their careers. Patriarchal cultures, which traditionally prioritise masculine leadership qualities, have also been observed to exclude women from professional networks (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015).

Furthermore, individuals' performance, identity, and competence can be greatly improved by the provision of a powerful image through role modelling. Role models are linked to networks; when a woman has access to a network, she has access to one of her role models (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015). This makes it difficult for this factor to have an impact on the leadership self-efficacy of Saudi women, as only a small percentage of Saudi women in higher education attained executive positions after the implementation of Vision 2030 in 2016 (Saleh & Malibari, 2021; Alsubaie & Jones, 2017).

2.16. Organisational barriers

Organisation is one of the factors that will be investigated in this study, and that is due to its significant influence over people's behaviours (Tran, 2021). However, several researchers highlighted organisational issues as being one of the barriers that Saudi women face in higher education (Hodges, 2017; Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Alsharif, 2018; Alghofaily, 2019).

2.16.1. Gender segregation and the hierarchical system

As previously noted, the majority of Saudi universities are gender segregated. This shapes the leadership system and provides men with easier access to leadership positions. These barriers limit opportunities for Saudi women to pursue higher education and hinder their ability to fully engage and succeed in being awarded academic leadership positions (Alsubhi et al., 2018). These barriers include limited access to resources and funding, a lack of support and recognition from their male counterparts, limited networking opportunities, and gender-based stereotypes and biases, and this is due to the gender segregated buildings (Alsubhi et al., 2018; Alhareth et al., 2015).

Furthermore, Tameem (2019) confirmed that the hierarchical system in Saudi higher

education, where the top positions are taken by men, created bureaucracy as part of the system, which contributed to limiting women's opportunities. In addition, Abu Alsuood and Youde (2018) stated that those hierarchical systems cause a lack of flexibility, with one of their study's participants stating:

In the sense that you do not manage to support those who are under you, but you try to manage in a way that satisfies the person above you. Consequently, the focus in the administrative process is not on the institutional success, but rather the gratification of the top management.

These barriers not only affect academic opportunities for Saudi women but also hinder their progress in leadership roles within educational institutions and contribute to enhancing the stereotype, as explained below. A study by Akbar et al. (2023) examines the leadership of women in various university environments, including those that practice gender segregated, women-only, and mixed-sex environments. Predominantly segregated universities exhibited the most significant obstacles to women's leadership, rendering female administrators nearly powerless, according to the findings. A women-only university, on the other hand, fostered the growth of women's leadership, while mixed-environment workplaces were regarded as supportive and amicable by women.

2.16.2. Stereotyping

Stereotypes are an image or idea of a certain type of person, group, or object (Beeghly, 2015; Clarke, 2020). In the context of Saudi women, several factors enhance this stereotype towards their ability, such as cultural and social norms, organisational structure and women's identity, as result of the glass ceiling.

In Saudi Arabia, men have traditionally held all positions of power and administration in universities, and women are subsequently delegated to them. In reality, male administrators do not fully empower women to run their department because of miscommunications, a lack of trust, and the belief that women are not equal to men in leadership roles. Thus, the acquisition of comprehensive experience in higher education by Saudi women is adversely affected by this stereotype in all aspects (Albasri, 2019;

Alsharif, 2018; Al-Qahtani et al., 2021).

Furthermore, stereotypes contribute to the perpetuation of unethical and unjust practices in the recruitment of women. Additionally, numerous studies have confirmed that Saudi women possess exceptional qualifications and competence; however, they are marginalised in the workplace and society at large due to societal beliefs that emphasise the pre-eminence and nature of males as leaders (Abalkhail and Allan, 2015; Al-Qahtani et al., 2021; Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Culture, not university policy or procedure, is to blame for this sexism in Saudi academic circles. The findings of a Saudi study conducted in 2017 by Hodges affirmed that 75% of those interviewed for career opportunities and promotions experienced gender-based discrimination and stereotyping. Furthermore, social class was a contributing factor; the more influential a woman's family is, the more she can achieve her goals effortlessly, regardless of whether or not racism and stereotyping play a role (Abalkhail, 2017; Alsubhi et al., 2018; Kattan, 2015).

On the other hand, a study by Abalkhail (2019) revealed several culturally responsive strategies for supporting the advancement of women into leading positions within higher education. These strategies include promoting gender diversity in leadership roles, implementing mentorship programmes for women, and addressing bias and discriminatory practices within educational institutions which perpetuate the notion that women are less qualified for or capable of taking on leadership roles (Alsubhi et al., 2018).

2.16.3. Lack of training

Training is a critical component in the development of leadership capabilities and the preparation of individuals for managerial positions (Lawson, 2008; Shufutinsky et al., 2020). In higher education, this resource was absent for specialised training programmes. One issue contributing to women's challenges in leadership roles was the dearth of chances for specialised training, recruiting, and management (Al-Kayed, 2015; Abalkhail, 2019; Alotaibi, 2020). Furthermore, a study by Abalkhail and Allan (2015) suggests that nepotism, which is called "wasta" in Arabic, has a negative impact on women's training opportunities in Saudi universities. This occurs when women use their family names and

connections to achieve training and leadership positions, while others without these connections are unlucky and unable to succeed.

Another reason women are less motivated to take courses is because of the poor quality of the training they receive as it does not address their actual needs (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). In this light, a study by Mayya et al. (2021) revealed that Saudi women who were enrolled in higher education expressed interest in pursuing training courses in a variety of ways: either by participating in committees to gain practical experience, or by attending courses that are specialised in specific competencies or occupations. A number of individuals conveyed their interest in enrolling in courses pertaining to trust building, leadership, risk and evaluation, stress management, gender awareness, and women's empowerment. A number of others have requested courses on internal work as opposed to interpersonal competencies such as organisational descriptions, policies, and procedures for senior leadership positions.

To conclude, the abovementioned discussion has been related to women's organisational barriers, whilst the next section will focus on personal barriers.

2.17. Personal barriers:

2.17.1. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capacity to master and complete a task in order to achieve the desired results (Vanninen, 2023). Bandura (1999) suggests that a person's self-efficacy level might be influenced by different factors, including the individual, the environment, and behaviour. Leadership self-efficacy is one factor that has motivated this author to conduct the investigation, in terms of women's beliefs and reactions towards her capability in performing leadership roles (Young, 2020; Vanninen, 2023). Various studies have discussed how stereotyping is considered one of the difficulties that affects women in their workplace (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2010). Campuzano (2019) stated that stereotypes about women leaders still exist and that women managers are perceived to lack the dedication and motivation needed to rise to the highest echelons. Additionally, they do not see themselves in leadership positions and do not think they are eligible for them.

Saudi women face similar challenges to what other women face in leadership positions

such as stereotyping, cultural problems, self-confidence, personal experiences, and master skills (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Alsharif, 2018; Alghofaily, 2019).

In addition, multiple Saudi researchers have shown that the previously mentioned societal and organisational obstacles have a negative impact on Saudi women's self-efficacy (Tameem, 2019; Al-Qahtani et al., 2021; Alotaibi, 2020; Alghamdi, 2023). Furthermore, as Bandura (1995) suggested, women's visible presence at work or in public may lead to a higher level of self-efficacy. The visibility of Saudi women in senior leadership positions before Vision 2030 was missing (Parveen, 2023). In addition, self-confidence and self-esteem, as a factor that enhances one's self-efficacy, is considered one of the personal issues that Saudi women have due to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, and there are few chances for them to embark on novel missions and take risks (Alsubhi et al., 2018; Machida & Schaubroeck, 2011; McCormick, 2001; Al-Qahtani, et al., 2021).

In spite of all these obstacles, women in leadership positions are outperforming males. The number of strong, independent women in leadership roles in business and academia is growing rapidly. According to studies, women have the potential to make a beneficial impact on university achievement if given the chance. If we take Princess Nourah University (PNU) as an example, it was founded relatively recently but has already won numerous scientific accolades since it began providing equal chances to women (Abdullah Dahlan, 2023).

2.17.2. Motivations

One of the most important qualities for professional leadership development, influencing the team, and pursuing goals is motivation (Bin Bakr and Alfayez, 2022). This element poses a challenge to Saudi women in higher education because of missing opportunities and the high number of challenges that have grown out of a lack of freedom and power in leadership roles (Alqahtani, 2021). A study by Alghofaily (2019) found that stereotypes in Saudi society that start from childhood for women have led to a change in women's self-image towards their aspiration to leadership positions.

Moreover, Gorondutse et al. (2021) conducted a study to determine the motivations that led to the higher effectiveness of women's leadership performance. The researchers confirmed that organisational justice-related elements such as quality of training, gender equality, and internal reasons such as knowledge were among the most influential determinants of their performance. However, a study by Alqahtani et al. (2022) stated that the motivations of Saudi women have increased after the implementation of Vision 2030, as a result of support from the government and the economy.

2.18. Summary of the position for Saudi women in higher education after Vision 2030

This study has presented the challenges that women face in higher education and the Vision 2030 implications on higher education. This section now focuses on presenting a summary of the most common impacts of Vision 2030 that relate to Saudi women in higher education.

- **New images for women's leadership**

Vision 2030 contributed to change regarding the limitations on female leadership in higher education. Women now hold positions that were previously limited to men, such as:

- *University rector position*: Appointing Professor Lilac al-Safadi as the first Saudi woman rector of the Saudi Electronic University in 2020.
- *Cultural Beaufre attaché*: this started in 2020 by announcing the appointment of three women in different countries: Fahda AL-Sheikh in Ireland, Dr. Amal Fatani in the UK, and Yosra Aljazari in Morocco.
- *Full authority for heads of department and deans*: as most universities have gender segregated buildings, where the full authority of women is limited, in 2017 a change was made by appointing Professor Dalal Nemenqani at the gender segregated University of Taif's Medical School to lead both sections (men and women).

In addition, all the changes for women's opportunities in higher education leadership, combined with high encouragement and support on social media, help to enhance the presence for women and reduce the stereotype.

- **Breaking the stereotype**

“Women are the source of development for any society. Without empowered women, it is difficult to reform societies, as women are half of society and are the educators of generations. Throughout history, it has proven women's prominent and effective role in driving change and decision-making” - King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud,2020.

Women are half of the society, as King Salman bin Abdulaziz said, and one of the important values of Vision 2030 is to break the stereotype about the role of women and help women see their own potential and abilities in a society that used to see women with a limited image. That limited image was everywhere but Saudi society is now beginning to see a new image of women driving their own cars and being able to make their own personal decisions. In addition, there have been increases of women’s participation in different professions and activities such as sport, entrepreneurship, and jobs.

Furthermore, legislation has been enacted to combat stereotypes. For instance, restrictions on obtaining a passport and travelling abroad have been eliminated. With the introduction of criminal penalties, there is protection for women in diverse work environments and from sexual harassment in the workplace. Sex-based employment discrimination is strictly prohibited, and all individuals, regardless of gender, are granted equal access. There has been the elimination of all limitations on the employment and career selection of women. Achieving gender equality and empowering women are essential for realising the full potential of sustainable development and creating a more just and prosperous world.

- **Training opportunities**

Princess Noura University's "Qiyadiyat initiative" is an example of how higher education in Saudi Arabia has facilitated the advancement of women to leadership roles to align with Vision 2030 reforms. The initiative improves the provision of leadership competencies, knowledge, mentorship opportunities, networking and

employment prospects, and provides access to professional development in order to empower Saudi women to strive for excellence and execute their duties efficiently (Kedan, 2023; Bakr, 2022).

Additionally, representing the higher education participation to empower women in collaboration with Princess Noura University (PNU) and other partners, the preeminent business facility for women in Saudi Arabia was established with the intention of creating over 20,000 job prospects for Saudi women in the coming decade. Its goal is to expand women's leadership engagement throughout the entire country (Parveen, 2023).

- **Development within higher education institutions**

Higher education has to play a key role to increase its rank and quality and to accomplish Vision 2030 goals. Saudi women represent almost half the employees in higher education. This change will promote female Saudi academics to increase their production in scientific research and to publish in the English language in high-ranking academic journals. In addition, it will equip them with the skills to make foreign collaborations that can enhance the quality and growth of higher education outcomes (Bataeineh & Aga, 2023; Parveen, 2023; Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). Further, a study by Mohiuddin et al. (2023) placed a focus on investigating the potential and priorities for higher education as reflections of the Vision 2030 framework, employing mixed methods to explore the perceptions of academicians, senior faculty, and vice deans who belong to ten well-known universities in Saudi Arabia. Their study found that universities are making an unprecedented and substantial contribution to the advancement of the vision. Findings indicate that higher education reforms are primarily motivated by Vision 2030. The findings indicate that industry-based academic learning outcomes, qualified graduates, new modern curricula, faculty development, innovation, research and collaboration with foreign institutions, accreditations, and lifelong learning with an emphasis on future skills are the most desired objectives. This advancement in higher education is narrowing the disparity between market growth and higher education outcomes.

2.19. Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature review has identified the ways in which the obstacles Saudi women faced in leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia have changed. It also presented concerted efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in higher education to achieve Vision 2030 goals. However, it takes time to profoundly change the culture and perception of women, which means that the obstacles that hinder the advancement of Saudi women may persist. Examples of such obstacles include social and cultural norms, regulatory policies and individual constraints. There is great potential for transformation and progress with the Vision 2030 initiative. Vision 2030, which aims to empower Saudi citizens and diversify the Saudi economy, may however pave the way for a more welcoming and inclusive climate for Saudi women seeking higher education.

Higher education in Saudi Arabia is expected to change in line with the goals of Vision 2030, which is geared towards addressing the constraints and challenges faced by Saudi women in academic work. Through collaborative efforts and ongoing support from both government and educational institutions, Saudi women will be able to achieve greater representation and influence in higher education leadership.

Chapter 3: Conceptual framework

3. Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to provide a better understanding of how the conceptual framework was used in this thesis. Bandura's social cognition theory of self-efficacy has been applied to explain an individual's behaviour and anticipated outcomes (Spagnola, 2022; Tian *et al.*, 2019). A considerable number of social and behavioural scientists have employed self-efficacy as a framework to comprehend, forecast, and explicate the development of behavior (Justus *et al.*, 2023; Dwyer, 2019; Alfrayan, 2014). In order to better understand the beliefs, leadership styles, organisations, and sources of self-efficacy of Saudi women in academic positions such as department managers and deans, this research endeavour applies self-efficacy theory focusing on leadership in the higher education area.

This chapter will introduce first the knowledge and literature that provide explanations to the self-efficacy theory, leadership self-efficacy and gender leadership self-efficacy. Then, this chapter will high lights on what leadership self-efficacy for Saudi women and the agencies that related to Saudi women leadership self-efficacy. At the end, it will provide how theory has been operated to enhance the interpretation and understanding of the three questions of the study.

3.1. Self-efficacy theory

Researchers in the fields of psychology, sociology, sports and healthcare have used the concept of self-efficacy to explain and predict a wide range of human behaviors (Artino, 2012; Zaman *et al.*, 2021; Ouyang *et al.*, 2020; Dicker *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, Studies on leadership have made considerable use of the concept of self-efficacy such as Bergman *et al.*, (2019); Dwyer (2019); Spagnola (2022) Ruggs *et al.* (2023). In particular, studies that seek to comprehend the developing work among different leaders (Moran *et al.*, 2021; Armstrong & McCain, 2021; Bracht *et al.*, 2021).

Self-efficacy is a theory developed by Albert Bandura in 1977 (Al Reshidi, 2019). This theory, which interprets an individual's personality on the basis of cognitive content and

behaviours acquired through interaction with the social and cultural environment, is among the most influential social cognitive theories (Prieto et al., 2009).

Also, self-efficacy is defined a key component of how people engage with their surroundings, and it acts as a bridge between what people know and what they do (Murphy, 2016). Additionally, it enables the individual to achieve their goals effectively in the work environment and enables him/her to work diligently, endure difficulties, and overcome them (Mohr, 2018; Hood et al., 2020).

In addition, high self-efficacy enhances a leader's ability to solve problems creatively and set goals, which is one of the drives for the leadership field to investigate self-efficacy theory (Shirey, 2020). As this research focused on understanding Saudi women's leadership self-efficacy in universities in Riyadh, the following paragraph will introduce more information about leadership self-efficacy.

3.2. Leadership self-efficacy

Bergman et al., (2019) stated on describing leadership self-efficacy, by saying that it is not a leadership style; rather it is focused upon manager's beliefs that drive the performance, about what one can do with whatever talents one has, and that enhance in choosing and adapting the requisite leadership style. Additionally, Bandura (1997) stated that self-efficacy is what one can behave as performance because one's personal beliefs and to one's interaction with external factors such as organisations and behaviours. As a consequence, a number of researchers who examined leadership self-efficacy designated it as the leader's assurance in possessing leadership attributes, including the ability to motivate employees, delegate responsibilities, and make solid evaluations (Shirey, 2020).

Self-efficacy is a characteristic that distinguishes those who aspire to leadership roles. This is because individuals who have high self-efficacy believe that they are capable of performing the duties associated with a leadership position (Machida et al., 2011; Kariuki 2020). Additionally, it is observed that self-efficacy affects the type of plans where highly qualified people might make effective and successful decisions (Gulmez & Negisisik, 2020).

When individuals successfully perform a certain skill or behaviour, this does not only

increase their self-efficacy beliefs regarding the practiced skill or behavior (e.g., Talsma et al., 2018), but it may also encourage individuals to set higher standards and goals for themselves as they move forward in their work (Abdelwahed et al., 2023). For instance, a leader who successfully leads a team of five may consequently feel confident enough to lead a larger team next time. In other words, success in one area may expand to self-efficacy toward a more complex challenge. Since self-efficacy relates to what the individual has successfully accomplished in previous experiences, a virtuous circle of self-efficacy and performance develops.

However, leadership self-efficacy can be classified as low or high, and that may affect a leader's work and its processes according to what it has presented earlier. It has been stated that the higher self-efficacy of the individual, the greater the ability of the individual to identify and adhere to goals and insist on achieving them and thus, overcome obstacles, and in case of failure he/she will have the ability to recover (Bergman et al., 2019). On the other hand, a leader with low self-efficacy would have a lack of confidence in their ability to succeed, therefore, they will avoid working on challenges and will be frustrated towards any opportunities (Anderson et al., 2008).

Several scholars have questioned whether leadership self-efficacy can influence or vary between men and women. Women faced different challenges compared to men in some work environments, and this is where the following section will discuss them.

3.3. Women's leadership self-efficacy

Gender as a factor relating to self-efficacy has been studied in different sectors, particularly among women in STEM, a person's academic performance, entrepreneurs, the gendered employees' voice, leadership competencies and their developments (Moran et al., 2021; Eibl et al., 2020; Dempsey & Jennings, 2014; Vanninen, 2023). Women have been treated in certain ways as it mentioned in the literature reviews. Therefore, some studies refer to women's self-efficacy in leadership, which may be affected by issues in comparison to those experienced by men leaders (Bobbio & Manganelli, 2009; Herbst, 2020). In particular, the following issues are addressed: stereotyping, self-confidence, leadership experiences, opportunities, and cultural

difference (Mohr, 2018). Herbst (2020) suggests that higher self-efficacy would help woman leaders to overcome behavioral problems due to gender discrimination.

Additionally, the importance of studying and applying the theory of self-efficacy appears in understanding the difference in behaviour at work between the sexes despite the they are equally qualified. In a study by Hartman & Barber (2020), they mentioned that men and women behave differently when seeking professional growth. These differences in goal pursuit mean that men will actively engage in career ambition even when they do not have the knowledge or experience to perform tasks. On the contrary, women seek to prove that they must possess the experience to reach a sense of competence in the workplace before they begin to raise their career aspirations.

This is where the theory of self-efficacy emerges, as it raises women's inner belief in their ability to engage in any new role and their ability to acquire new knowledge while performing tasks.

In addition, it is perceived that while men tend to credit natural talent with their achievements, research shows that women are more likely to credit perseverance and hard work (Byrne, 2020). Moreover, the persistence of gender stereotypes in fact impedes women from being assessed on only the basis of their own achievements. The stereotypically caring role of women can backfire if they exhibit too much sensitivity and kindness; conversely, being strong and decisive can lead to accusations of being "harsh" (Keohane, 2020). This type of difference in how women behave in the workplace enhances the stereotype, and it can be interrupted by low self-confidence, lack of experience, etc., and this contributes to increasing gender gap for future leadership positions and limitations for women (Martínez et al., 2021; Pohl et al., 2020).

Moreover, Yeagley et al. (2010) argued that there is a positive relationship between the high level of self-efficacy and women's pursuit of leadership positions. Their study also employed social cognitive theory as a framework to explore women interest in leadership positions. Therefore, understanding leadership self-efficacy for Saudi women can benefit future research especially after the current change for women's status due to Vision 2030 (Alharbi, 2022). Thus, the next paragraph will present more about it.

3.4. Saudi women leadership self-efficacy

Before presenting leadership self-efficacy for Saudi women who worked in management roles in higher education, this thesis will present the definition of self-efficacy in Arabic context. The participants of the research targets Saudi women participants whose language is Arabic, found that self-efficacy in the Arabic language can be translated in two different ways, and this leads to two definitions.

Firstly, (كفاءة) (Kafaah): Self-efficacy refers to the capacity, or fundamental capacity, to perform the task at hand. This is commonly used to impart fundamental knowledge or skills to children or learners who are just beginning to acquire those skills. There are two possible indicators that possessing it or not possessing it.

Secondly (كفاية) (Kyfayah): Self-efficacy means competency, which means to what extent that level of skills one has, and it can be at different levels: high, middle, and low. As part of implementing rigour in this study, this difference in Arabic has been taken into account in the translation process that will be presented in the methodology chapter.

This thesis employed self-efficacy as it presented in the second Arabic definition above. Because this study focused on understanding Saudi women's behavior in academic leadership positions such as deans and heads of departments who they have experiences and qualifications. Therefore, leadership self-efficacy in this study will explore how the leadership competencies have influenced by their self-efficacy. Also, how their leadership self-efficacy has been impacted by different factor such as beliefs and organisations.

According to the Saudi higher education research, the system is large, well-developed and required new achievements that align with Vision 2030 (Mohiuddin et al., 2023; Onsman, 2011). This confirmed that Saudi academic women are part of any development and change movement, where most of the literature confirmed their high qualifications. Moreover, the history and development of education has contributed to the development of self-efficacy among Saudi women, either negatively or positively. It may be positive by providing some future opportunities for her and empowering her, which may contribute to creating a higher confidence within women, and intellectual belief in her abilities and thus

reflect on her behaviour (Al Assaf, 2019). On the other hand, it may be negative as Saudi women, like other women, have encountered some obstacles, such as the current opportunities enjoyed by Saudi women that have come through years of graduality, development and community, and may at some point have a sense of minority compared to Saudi men or lack of leadership positions for cultural barriers such as limited acquiring new skills. Obviously, that have led to their lack of self-efficacy (Tameem, 2019). As Bandura (1995) suggested, women's presence in a visible way at work or in public may lead to a higher level of self-efficacy. In addition, Airini et al (2011) mentioned that stereotypes as an obstacle could negatively impact upon female self-efficacy.

All of this reinforces the importance of applying self-efficacy theory in this study. Before this study explains how this theory works, the following section discusses the agencies that influence Saudi women's leadership behaviour in higher education.

3.5. Saudi women's behavioral agency in leadership

Part of developing the conceptual framework, is understanding the Saudi women's behavioral agency in leadership. Additionally, it is a significant to see how the self-efficacy theory might function in Saudi's agency structure. The agency in social science research refers to a person's ability to make decisions and act in diverse ways as a result of those decisions, resulting in a change in their way of life (Code, 2020; Bergman et al., 2019). In this theory, Bandura states that human agency may take numerous forms, including direct personal agency which is impacted by proxy agency and collective agency (Bandura, 2013).

Personal agency: is defined as the spontaneous and unanticipated power to influence one's own actions, outcomes, and opportunities in any given situation (Bandura, 2001; Kockelman, 2007). In addition, it is mentioned that individual agency refers to the situation in which a person acts on their own behalf (Bandura, 2001).

The most significant personal agency that influences Saudi women's self-belief is the stereotype, which can be also considered as a social agency. It is an agency that may limit women to behave in her leadership role because it has created the glass ceiling in that Saudi women feel they are not like men in leadership due to patriarchal culture

(Hodges, 2017). As it has been mentioned in the literature, raising women since childhood as being followers to men or being different in terms of capabilities, can create a belief that influences her negatively (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). The importance to understanding this belief in the Saudi higher education context is raised especially after the changes of Vision 2030 that set equity between two genders. In addition, self-confidence, aspirations, motivations, a role's preparation, and experience - all of this helps to construct a person's beliefs which is a personal agency that can drive Saudi women to have low or high leadership self-efficacy (Alghamdi, 2023).

Proxy agency: refers to the situation in which an individual acts on behalf of another person (the employer, for example) (Bandura, 2001). Saudi women's self-efficacy can be influenced by proxy agency, where women work in gender segregated buildings and they are delegated by men to perform their leadership duties, knowing that some women in leadership positions do not receive full authorisation, which may affect self-confidence, motivation and having full experience in their roles. However, this study targets women in different Saudi universities such as mixed and women-only, where it will allow the research to explore the sources in-depth. In addition, motivation and self-confidence might be influenced by the emotional and verbal influence which are also sources that this study investigated.

Further, proxy agency plays a role in the organisational factor in terms of heads of department and deans' ability to delegate and trust. These skills are related to one with high leadership self-efficacy and effectiveness of leadership that has been measured in some research (Brandmo et al., 2021; Brinkmann et al., 2021; Gonaim, 2016). Trust is related to delegation in leadership, and it results from past experience with the leader. When the leader is able to motivate and manage, she will be able to build trust that allows her to delegate (Brandmo et al., 2021). In this study, there will be an opportunity to understand how this competency relates to leadership style and contributes to creating the type of work environment.

Collective agency: refers to situations in which multiple individuals take collective action, such a social movement (Bandura, 2001). The following self-efficacy resources:

Experience, role model and training – which can be related to collective agency and limited to Saudi women in universities as mentioned in the literature section. This is referring to social and culture norms where it limited or empowered the behaviours of Saudi women. The literature review of this thesis has pointed out the role that culture has played in limiting the opportunities to Saudi women in leadership positions in higher education (Alsubhi et al., 2018; Alsharif, 2018; Abalkhail, 2017). On the other hand, this study may find that sources have been improved and offered especially after Vision 2030 which opens the doors for women's empowerment, and updated policies that can enhance their performance, experience, and aspirations (Alessa et al., 2022; Fakehy et al., 2021; Alharbi, 2022).

Moreover, Collective culture for organisations and leadership style, which are the factors this study investigates, can exist in the research in two forms: organisational culture and societal culture. In Saudi Arabia, social culture influenced the higher education institutions' by setting the system for gender segregated building, and culturally enabling men to have power to manage the women's section. This can influence the responsiveness level of the organisation culture. It makes it responsive or unresponsive which may limit academic Saudi women leaders in adapting the leadership style they prefer. It has been stated that there is an inverse and participative link between manager behaviour and organisational culture, which means that manager behaviour may impact culture and managers influence organisational culture (Smircich, 2017; Akanji et al., 2020). However, this agency may not be there any more after the changes of Vision 2030 as it has been mentioned in literature review. Vision 2030 implements a change in this culture in terms of empowering women and affecting the traditional organisational culture (Bunaiyan, 2019). Also, it will not be influential for the women-only university, and it may or may not for the mixed university, so employing this theory has contributed to in-depth analysis and understanding of the responsiveness in different universities' structures. However, this study does not focus on understanding universities' structures but rather how the participants perceive the responsiveness of their environments.

The following section will present how this theory has been operationalised.

3.6. Operationalising conceptual framework

The behaviour of people is the result of what Bandura called "Triadic Reciprocity" - the interplay of behavioural, personal, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1999). Individuals' perceptions of their capability to deliver or complete tasks are influenced by this interaction (Shaikh et al., 2023; Bandura, 1999; Lo Schiavo et al., 2019). This study aimed to examine the comprehension of Saudi women's leadership self-efficacy by exploring three key factors: the origins of leadership self-efficacy, beliefs, organisations, and leadership styles. It will be discussed and presented, in that order, below.

1. Sources of leadership self-efficacy:

According to Bandura are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Korman et al., 2022). This resource was implemented to understand how they influence Saudi women in their managerial positions in academia. So, the question that has been formulated to understand sources of leadership self-efficacy is stated below:

- To what extent are sources of leadership self-efficacy (experiences, training, Influence of emotions, verbal effect) available to Saudi academic women leaders in their workplace, from their perspective?

The sources are shown in the following chart:



Figure 2: Sources of leadership self-efficacy.

- Mastery experience:** the term "learn by doing" describes the process by which a person gains confidence in their abilities after putting those talents into practice in a real-world setting. When people have positive experiences, it boosts their confidence and belief in their own abilities, which leads to what is known as high self-efficacy (Bellemans and Devos, 2023). On the other hand, low self-efficacy can result from an individual's failures, which can be caused by either a lack of experience or a weak amount of experience (Shirey, 2020). Therefore, the source in this study is refer to leadership experience for Saudi academic women, it focuses on understanding the type and length of experience and how its related to their certain roles (Salanova et al., 2022). Investigating this source that depends on what affects them in their current role, by providing them with knowledge, readiness, problem-solving ability, and the ability to develop (Shirey, 2020; Orsini & Coers, 2022).

- **Vicarious experiences:** the people we see every day, particularly those we look up to as role models, provide us with indirect experiences. The effectiveness of indirect experiences is magnified when the individual perceives the model or comparison group as being similar to themselves, which can lead to the belief that one can also excel in a field by seeing the consistent efforts of others. The viewer's confidence in their own abilities is more likely to be boosted by models who openly face challenges rather than those who appear to never make a mistake. Additionally, the existence of role models in the workplace has been proven to affect leadership self-efficacy positively (Campuzano, 2019; Paule & Yelin, 2022; Salanova et al., 2022). Indirect experience has less influence on mastery experience, but it is extremely important when one has limited expertise or understanding in the tasks or activities conducted by the other (Bellemans and Devos, 2023).

This source in an academic Saudi women leader's world can be represented in two ways: role models, and training. Leadership training - because it is considered that numerous studies have demonstrated that effective leadership development programmes incorporate a foundational curriculum covering fundamental management concepts and skills for addressing challenges like negotiation and conflict management. These programmes also provide mentoring, training, coaching, and experiential leadership opportunities (Sonnino, 2016; Getha-Taylor, et al., 2015). For this reason, training is also considered one of the sources for leadership self-efficacy in this thesis. According to different scholars, it enhances leadership self-efficacy (Lartey et al., 2023; Al Reshidi, 2019; Abou Hashish & Bajbeir, 2022). Thus, training has been applied to the indirect experience within this thesis, particularly that the trainee may start building new networks and experience during the courses which is part of leadership growth.

- **Verbal persuasion:** beliefs in one's capability to carry out responsibilities and duties and succeed are implanted through social or verbal persuasion, which includes both verbal and nonverbal responses from others. Inspiring words from

those who individuals look up to, including managers, coaches, and coworkers, can increase self-efficacy. This will enable people to solve problems and have high endurance to overcome challenges (Bellemans & Devos, 2023; Bandura, 1999). Determining in depth the extent to which this source influences Saudi women in the workplace is therefore crucial. Their daily interactions with coworkers, upper management, and students expose them to language that has the potential to impact their job performance. Furthermore, this resource will enable this study to delve deeper and uncover additional effects that could be linked to the ultimate behaviour of Saudi women.

- **Physiological states:** in numerous scholarly articles, the impact of an individual's sentiments and emotional state on their work environment has been examined as a significant factor (Tran, 2021; Shubayra et al., 2022; Chiu et al., 2021). It is also regarded as one of the factors that, according to Bandura's theory, can permeate or diminish self-efficacy such as anxiety, tension, burnout, contentment, assurance, and security, among others (Usher et al., 2015). Researching the emotions that Saudi women may have as a result of their demanding jobs, the difficulties they face on the job, or other personal, familial, and social circumstances might shed light on the origins of these feelings and the extent to which they affect leadership self-efficacy.

At the end, employing this theory allows this thesis to understand deeply how each source can be effective and why it may not make any difference in their behaviours.

2. Self-efficacy beliefs

Application of this conceptual framework was subsequently investigated in this thesis to Saudi women's beliefs toward their current management role. A person's beliefs are widely regarded as one of the most important factors that determine their leadership behaviours (Mohr, 2018). According to Bandura (1999), for an individual to attain desirable levels of accomplishment, they require beliefs that fortify their own capabilities to do so. Bandura explained that the individual cannot engage in a specific skill without

fullness, but he stressed that having a picture within the person about him/herself may help to raise his/her performance and speed of learning (Bandura,1999; Salanova et al., 2022). Bandura (2001) added that self-efficacy (as a belief) gives the individual full responsibility for the completion of complex work and a person's responsibility for developing skills and overall growth (Gülmez & Işık,2020).

To understand the behaviour, it necessary to understand what it has been driven by, thus, the research question has been formulated as below:

- How do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?

The belief in this study is implemented to understand how it relates to a level of leadership self-efficacy (leadership behaviours) as outlined below:

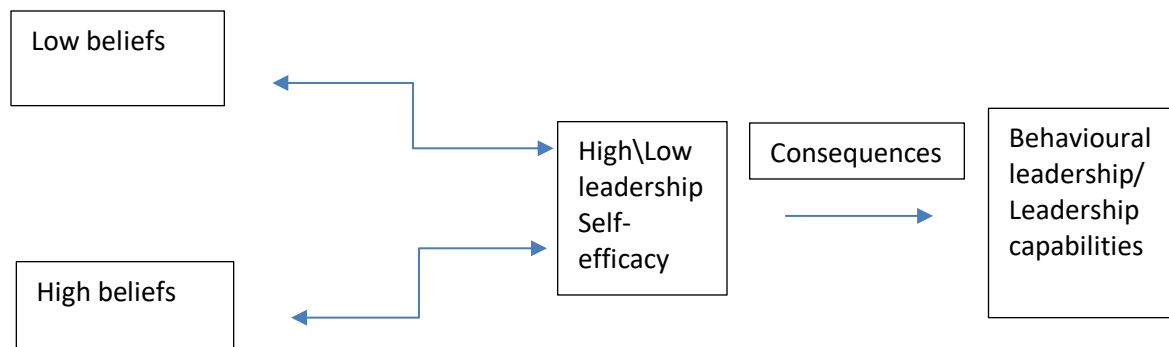


Figure 3: Beliefs and level of self-efficacy.

This study focuses on leadership self-efficacy, it shows these in two levels: high and low self-efficacy, related to the beliefs that one has. Thus, this study aims to understand the type of beliefs that Saudi women have and how these are related to their current leadership positions. Exploring their prior perceptions towards the nature of leadership roles, and toward their abilities in believing they can perform their leadership duties. Moreover, studies indicate leadership self-efficacy as people who aspire to leadership positions are distinguished by high self-efficacy because of their positive belief in their ability to perform certain tasks (Machida et al, 2011; Baroudi & Hojeij, 2020; Bergman et

al., 2021; Machida & Schaubroeck, 2011). Therefore, self-efficacy in leadership can be seen in leaders' competencies which defined it as competence associated with the skills, knowledge and confidence of the leader him/herself and qualities to manage the team successfully (Hanna et al., 2012).

Consequently, this thesis applies self-efficacy theory by exploring the beliefs that Saudi academic women have toward their roles, aspirations and leadership duties and accordingly how do they behave with their, goals, teams, and challenges? The performance indications that will guide this study to discover the level of leadership self-efficacy include several characteristics such as creativity, strategic planning, developing a vision, team management, successful plans, ability to motivate and aspire, solving problems, high endurance etc (Al-Yousef, 2016; Shirey, 2020; Spagnola, 2022; Murphy, 2016; Hijazi, 2024).

3. Organisations and leadership styles:

The two factors influence each other for this reason this section will provide information of how the theory has been applied to understand them and to answer the following research question:

- How do the environmental work types (responsiveness, unresponsiveness, and semi-responsiveness) influence Saudi academic women's leaders' leadership styles?

By applying this theory, this study will have a deeper understanding of how different types of organisations impact leaders' adaption to their own leadership style, which is based on the behaviours they display.

This conceptual framework can provide additional insight into the attributes of each organisation type. The term "organisational culture" refers to this element, which contributes to a more comprehensive comprehension of leadership behaviours. It is defined in this thesis by members' perspectives, principles, and beliefs, as well as their personal experiences that are used to catalogue organisational culture, as mentioned earlier (Smircich, 2017; Wilson, 2001). Figure 4 below illustrates how organisations, as

an influential factor in self-efficacy theory, shape leadership behaviours.

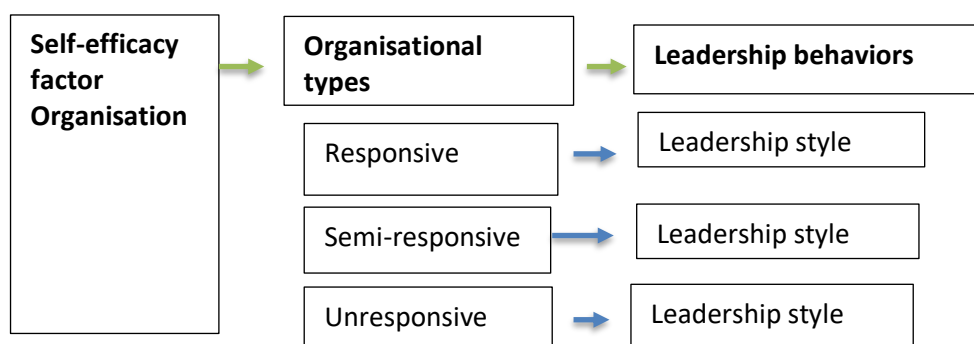


Figure 4: The organisations.

Figure 4 illustrates that the organisation plays a significant and influential role in shaping the behaviour of leaders. The behaviour of their leadership has been introduced as their leadership style. The diagram showed how different types of organisations, as categorised by self-efficacy theory (responsive, semi-responsive, and unresponsive), influence their capacity to adopt specific leadership styles. Additionally, theory predicts that each type of organization can influence samples' behaviors differently. Therefore, a responsive environment may foster certain leadership styles that may not be found in an unresponsive one. In the following paragraph, the organisation will be discussed in detail.

Organisations:

Organisation considered to be essential variables that challenge the leadership competencies of Saudi women, as was discussed earlier in the literature reviews chapters (Tameem, 2019; Alsubaihi, 2016).

According to Kamerman & Kahn (2010), the **responsive** environment is defined by its quick growth, inspiring atmosphere, adaptable schedule, opportunities for professional and personal development, friendly colleagues and managers, accessible location, promotion possibilities, employment stability, and acknowledgments for tasks completed. While on the other hand, the **unresponsive** environment is characterised by the opposite such as slow development, a toxic environment, bureaucracy, lack of incentives and an

unmotivated atmosphere. Additionally, the **semi-responsive** environment will fall somewhere between responsive and unresponsive. Saudi women in higher education voices, beliefs, opinions about their own environment will determine whether their organisation is responsive, semi responsive or unresponsive.

Furthermore, according to self-efficacy theory, people who have different levels of self-efficacy interactions in different types of organisations will produce several different behavioural results (Sari, 2017). So, people with a high level of self-efficacy behave in the three different types of organisations as below:

- Responsive environment: An individual who possesses a high sense of self-efficacy achieves success in the tasks they undertake when they operate in a responsive environment that possesses all the necessary elements to inspire such behaviour, including areas for development, innovation, and adaptability. This is because of the presence of two factors: a high level of self-efficacy and an environment that is enabling.
- Semi-responsive environment: There are positives that help the individual to innovate, but there are obstacles that require them to double the effort, so he will work harder to solve problems and at the same time will continue to develop individuals and achieve goals to the extent possible to do it.
- Unresponsive environment: Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy who operate within an unresponsive and resistant-to-change work environment will be required to apply their utmost intensive efforts. The highly independent person resolves to work harder, but frequently, due to the adversity of change, they choose to relocate to an environment where they can achieve their objectives with greater efficiency.

On the other hand, the low-self-efficacy level will lead individuals to conduct the following behaviours (Sari, 2017; Kamerman & Kahn, 2010; Situmorang & Wijayanti,

2018):

- Responsive environment: one with low-self-efficacy working in a responsive environment that has all the elements that motivate their behaviour to grow, be creative, and change. However, this will cause them to feel frustrated and unable to carry out tasks in proportion to the organisation's growth, which in turn causes them to lose faith in their own abilities.
- Semi-responsive environment: A person with low self-efficacy working in this type of environment that is stimulating on one side and frustrating in the other, the expected behaviour based on this Bandura hypothesis will make them feel frustrated and unable to execute tasks which in turn leads to them losing confidence in their own abilities.
- Unresponsive environment: An individual with low self-efficacy in an unresponsive workplace would believe that she is incapable of making the necessary efforts to complete tasks and goals, which may lead to her playing a negative role in his contribution to this environment. As a result of feeling impotent in such an environment, Bandura (1999) hypothesised that an individual with low self-efficacy might neglect their responsibilities.

Leadership styles are impacted by organisations and degrees of self-efficacy. This information will be provided in the next section.

Leadership styles:

Self-efficacy theory will enhance the study to explore how the women react according to their organisation type. Their reaction and responses in this study has been interpreted as leadership styles. According to the research of Turner & Müller (2005), a manager's or leader's style consists of the behaviours they employ to motivate their teams to accomplish novel objectives. This style can be impacted by both the organisational environment and the principles upheld by individual leaders.

Furthermore, Among the most dependable instruments for assessing leadership style is the MLQ 5X, which examines a variety of leader characteristics including charisma, motivation to learn, taking into account individuals, incentives, management-by-exception, proactive leadership, and passive-avoidant leadership. This attributes in the MLQ 5X is agreed and similar to leadership self-efficacy scale that was presented by Bobbio & Manganelli (2009) and Ng & Chan (2008). These supports applying this theory to explore the leadership styles.

Additional research shows a correlation between elevated levels of self-efficacy and various leadership approaches, as exemplified subsequently.

- Leadership styles for one with high self-efficacy: The leadership style of the leader has been studied from several studies by understanding how the effectiveness of the leader's performance have reached that leader with the high self-efficacy and that they tend to apply the transformational leadership style and transactional leadership styles which enable them to make to greater changes in the organisation (Cobanoglu & Yurek, 2018; Hussain & Hassan, 2016; Gassemi *et al.*, 2021). In addition, Anderson *et al.*, (2008) found that high leadership self-efficacy is related to creative and strategic leadership approaches.
- Leadership styles for one with low self-efficacy: Several studies focused on the low level of self-efficacy and leadership effectiveness and the leadership style that has been applied. For example, the results of the study by Hussain & Hassan (2016) showed that the democratic leadership style was used by leaders with a low level of self-efficacy and confirmed that its impact on change and growth in the organisation is lower when compared to the transformational style. In addition, Gassemi *et al.* (2021) argued that *laissez-faire* leaders tend to lead as having no responsibility, not motivating the team, and therefore associated with low self-efficacy.

To summarize, this conceptual framework combined the expected behavioral results that Bandura hypothesises with the expected leadership style as presented below in the table (2).

	Environments	Low Self-efficacy	LS-Leadership style	High Self-efficacy	HS-Leadership style
Organisation	Responsive	Low performance	Leadership style where leader behave with a minimum influence to change	High performance	Leadership style where has a high potential and influence for change and innovation in the workplace
	Semi-responsive	Low performance	Leadership style where has a minimum influence to change or may be unable to solve issues	High performance	Leadership style where behave needs to overcome some challenges and support growth
	Unresponsive	Low performance	Leadership style where has a minimum influence to change	High performance	Leadership style with high efforts to change but it may not work so leader may move out to different organisation.

Table 2: environments and behaviours.

3.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presents the conceptual framework for this research, utilizing the self-efficacy theory. This theory was used in the study to understand Saudi women's leadership self-efficacy and how it is influenced by their beliefs. Leadership self-efficacy enhances a leader's ability to manage, motivate, and solve problems. Several scholars have noted that women in positions of leadership may face specific challenges related to their gender (Mohr, 2018; Bobbio & Manganelli, 2009; Herbst, 2020). However, possessing a strong sense of self-efficacy might enable them to effectively address these challenges (Herbst, 2020). In addition, this theory helps us to understand the sources that

enhance their leadership self-efficacy. Finally, it will allow for an understanding of how organizations influence the leadership style they have adopted.

Chapter 4: Leadership literature reviews

4. Introduction

This is the fourth chapter of this thesis, which introduces the literature reviews in seven different sections: leadership, leadership styles, gender leadership style, leadership in higher education, women's leadership and organisational culture. This section of the literature review examines international research in order to gain a broader understanding of the history of leadership and its evolution over time as a practice and concept for women. Furthermore, it will highlight how numerous scholars have differentiated leadership styles according to their influence and gender predilection. A crucial aspect that plays a role in influencing the behaviours of leaders is the culture of the organisation.

4.1. Leadership

Over the span of history, there has been a consistent shift in the nature of leadership and the leaders who hold power (Almawi, 2022). Naturally there is a strong historical relationship between leadership improvement, since history's events contribute to the formation of leaders' character and skills (Day & Zaccaro, 2014). For instance, the ability to solve problems, lead others, communicate effectively, and plan strategically (Adair, 2022).

In previous times, a leader was understood as powerful. A leader was obeyed by their followers for fear of the leader withholding income, which in turn stopped followers being able to support their families (Adair, 2022; Lunenburg, 2012). This form of governance has largely vanished from the globe, with the exception of a few nations or cultures that strictly adhere to the dictatorial style. This style, defined by Leber et al (2023), suggests that the leader makes all decisions and decides who will carry out the rules of the land. Followers are not able to share their opinions on such decisions.

Leadership is a concept that refers to the individuals who are in charge of overseeing and directing an organisation in a certain direction and is the driving force behind any effective

organisation (Jaques, 2017). The word leadership has been described in various ways (Femi-Cole & Weese, 2022). "Leadership" is defined in one instance as the never-ending loop of leaders and followers pursuing common or individual objectives through the competitive mobilisation of diverse economic, political, and other resources (Fritz & Van Knippenberg, 2018). In another instance, leadership is described as the ability of a leader to manage and engage with others and set goals to build an organisation's future vision (Dirani et al., 2020; Femi-Cole & Weese, 2022). The primary function of leadership in institutions is to empower and encourage workers to achieve the company's goals (Fritz & Van Knippenberg, 2018).

Through these definitions, it can be concluded that there are several skills that characterise the leader, such as: specific communication skills and interaction with others and the skill of critical thinking in order to develop and transform institutions (Adair, 2022). In addition, some researchers have stressed the importance of the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills of leaders in the workplace (Widjaja & Saragih, 2018). Interpersonal skills are defined as skills which manifest external interactions, such as social and communication skills. Intrapersonal skills, on the other hand, are defined as the ability of leaders to realise their strengths and weaknesses, for example, self-confidence, self-control, optimism, and adaptation (Anggraeni & Tarmidi, 2021; Agbarakwe & Attih, 2023). However, some researchers have highlighted clear gendered leadership differences (Eagly & Carli, 2018), and these will be presented after the leadership style sections.

4.2. Leadership theories and styles

Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), Clinton (1992), Markham (2012) state that the first theory of leadership style was created in the 1800s and is known as "the great man theory". The notion of the "great man" suggests that every leader has an individual trait (Chou & Naimi, 2020). It assumes that leadership skills cannot be learned, but they are innate: the leader has noticeable qualities distinguished since birth and childhood (Davidsson, 2022). However, Gregory-Mina (2012) emphasises that the great man theory does not pay attention to women in leadership positions. Gregory-Mina also explains that most studies depending on this theory assume that only male characteristics are suitable for a

leadership position (Gregory-Mina, 2012).

Behavioral Theory

In the 20th century, leadership theory and practice shifted from focusing on leaders' attributes and characteristics to analysing their behaviour and outcomes (Bratton, 2020; By, 2021; Northouse, 2021). There were four major behavioural studies, which are presented respectively below (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). The first one suggested by Lewin and Lippitt (1938) has three dimensions which are known as autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire styles of leadership. In their study, they established two groups of sixth and fifth forms from different ages (10 to 11). After that, Lewin and Lippitt (1938) perceived how both groups interact with their leaders, and they found that the most effective style in leadership is the democratic one.

Current research also claims that the democratic style of leadership continues to garner considerable interest owing to its many benefits. In the long term, it helps the company and develops future leaders. Democratic leadership encourages workers to share and act upon their innovative ideas and to have a voice in important company decisions, all of which have a good impact on productivity. By emphasising group participation and discussion, a democratic leader influences the performance of the adherents and the organisational climate in a positive way (Northouse, 2021; Zineldin & Hytter, 2012; (Al-maaitah et al., 2021; Akanji et al., 2020).

The second behavioural theory was introduced by a several researchers from Ohio State. (Lord et al., 2017). They divided leadership into two scales: firstly initiating, and secondly consideration structures. It was defined that consideration entailed being mindful of the thoughts and emotions of one's adherents. The term "initiating structure" refers to arranging work relationships in order to achieve employment goals (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). The behavioural theory has been explained by Kerr et al. (1974) as a mode of leadership where leaders should regard the sensations and views of their employees. In addition, leaders should plan to achieve the institutions' goals (Lord et al., 2017)

The third study on behavioural leadership was improved by Kahn and Katz (1953) as part of their research at the University of Michigan's research centre. The centre has carried out several research projects which relate to behavioural leadership through different areas of studies, surveys and experiences. Behavioural leadership is explained by Kahn and Katz (1953) through two scales. In the first scale, the leader focuses on the group task and how it is coordinated and manages to achieve productivity. In the second scale, the leader motivates their employees to achieve the organisation's goals through positive and supported personal relationships (Bryman, 2013).

Blake and Mouton (1964) developed a fourth leadership theory that enhanced understanding of leaders' behaviour (Curtis, 2002). This research concentrated on the two aspects of the employee and productivity in order to assess productive leadership. As such, the employee, hierarchy, and managerial grid are regarded as the three global features for organisations (Ayub et al., 2014). Blake and Mouton (1964) explain that the dimensions of the grid depend on two factors in the organisation, which are the employees and their productivity. Blake and Mouton (1964) believed that the leader of the workplace or the director of the institute's hierarchy has the highest influence on the degree of quality and quantity of employees' productivity and performance, whether this be negatively or positively.

As discussed earlier, it is noticeable that behavioural theory has paid more attention to male leadership, while neglecting women's' aspects of leadership. This is because of the perceived weakness ascribed to women leaders in their workplace (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). Another theory developed during the 1960s is that of contingency, which was developed by Hersey and Blanchard (Vidal et al., 2017). Hersey and Blanchard asserted that effective and successful leadership is a flexible style where leaders can change their decisions from one situation to another depending upon the variable factors taken into account, such as followers, objectives and workplace (Jaques, 2017). Moreover, the two divisions of contingency models were mentioned by Vidal et al (2017) the first one connected with the internal characteristics of contingency such as values, behaviour and gender; the second division connected with the personal, where the potency of leadership

relies on interaction with the employees in different situations.

Furthermore, during the 1960s the feminist movement's research experienced a rise in publications (Allen, 2023). At that time, researchers aimed to discuss the opportunities for woman leaders in the workplace. Consequently, androgyny (a new terminology) was suggested (Bem, 1977). This was defined by Bem (1977) as an outcome of human development without considering binarised gender.

Modern theory:

The previous theories concentrated on characteristics and behaviours of leaders (Al-Sharija, 2012). However, other theories focused on the change and process of improvement such as transformational theory and transactional theory (ibid., 2). Transformational leadership style is exemplified by Burns' 1978 transformational theory. The elements that form the foundation of his philosophy are the values and the needs of humans, and the improvement of ethical standards (Bin Bakr & Alfayez, 2022; Abun et al., 2020). Burns defines this theory as a situation where "leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation" (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020). In addition, Burns clarified that the transformational approach focuses on motivating to achieve importance changes with employees and organisations (Yavuz, 2020). This change could happen through the implementation of individual prospectives and the employees' ambitions, and by redeveloping value visualisations (Yavuz, 2020). On the other hand, leadership through transactional theory focuses on achieving the organisation's goals (Antonakis, 2012). Leaders reward the employees who achieve their missions, whereas employees who do not fulfil their duties face punishments (Antonakis, 2012; Richards, 2020).

Between 1970 and 1980, Japanese leadership shone through Japan's economy, which had experienced a remarkable growth and was now considered the world's third largest economy (Mujtaba & Isomura, 2012). Japan's leadership was defined by Taka and Foglia (1994) as a management style where managers use cultural knowledge to perceive and resolve problems. In addition, they confirmed that Japanese leadership involved all

workers to raise productivity. This was introduced by Ouchi in 1982 through *theory Z*, which considers the job security of employees to increase workplace stability (Ouchi, 1981). In addition, employees experience a collective responsibility with their manager as they share feelings of friendship to achieve organisational goals. They are rewarded for making a group effort rather than an individual effort (Ouchi, 1981). Moreover, the process in making decisions is considered to be a shared process as the team makes final decisions collectively. This motivates them to achieve their aims with a large sense of responsibility (Ouchi, 1981). It is noticeable that theory Z focuses on sharing decisions without any implications for gendered differences.

Furthermore, according to Hosmer (1982), contingency theories of leadership failed to consider the competitive standing of an organisation within its industry. From here, the importance of strategic leadership has been raised. In regard to an organisation's strategy in relation to the external environment, Hosmer argued that the responsibility of a leader differs from that of a manager (Hosmer, 1982; Kiyak et al., 2011). Additionally, further researchers have introduced strategic leadership (Özer & Tınaztepe, 2014; Kiyak et al., 2011). A strategic leader is one who can foresee challenges, formulate a compelling vision, delegate authority, and be adaptable in order to shape an organisation's future in a way that will assure its success. They achieve this by creating procedures and frameworks that influence the organisation's current and future efficiency. They have the necessary expertise to envision the future, formulate strategies to achieve it, and make important decisions in a constantly changing setting (Yardı & Aksöz, 2023).

During the last two decades, the new concept of a new style of leadership has been generated and is called shared leadership (Novoselich & Knight, 2019). This is defined through vital and interactive steps starting from each individual in the groups. It aims to achieve the specific goals for the groups or institutions (Novoselich & Knight, 2019). This suggests that a new type of leadership concentrates on the decision-making process. It transforms leadership from its hierarchical methods to a more social and active process where every individual can take part in making decisions (Wassenaar & Pearce, 2012). Importantly, Wassenaar and Pearce (2012) have concluded that shared leadership can

be classified into three stages. The first one is an individual stage which promotes feelings of satisfaction and increases the effectiveness of employee performance. Secondly, the team stage is clearly related to trust amongst team members. Finally, there is an organisational stage which focuses upon financial and performance outputs (Wassenaar & Pearce, 2012). However, Kukenberger and D'Innocenzo (2020) suggested that shared leadership may not work effectively among gender diverse groups. This is because large gender biases could negatively impact the assessment and realisation of possible leadership participation and colleagues' expertise.

On the other hand, a new approach for leadership has been presented by Kock et al. (2019), which is the empathic leadership style. This is a result of previous research on emotions in the workplace, the backing of leaders towards these feelings, and the philosophy of motivational language (Kock et al., 2019; Negoro & Wibowo, 2021). Empathetic leadership is distinguished by placing emphasis on comprehending the emotional state of others and demonstrating a readiness to attend to their needs through proactive steps. Also, regardless of how well the followers do, this offers real understanding and support during transformations and tough times. The leader who follows this style needs to have knowledge of the emotional states of their followers, so that they can convey this understanding and encourage their followers to manage these emotions (Yue et al., 2023; Kock et al., 2019). However, a number of researchers have argued that gender is a factor that contributes to the differentiation of leadership styles, which will be discussed in the following sections.

4.3. Women's leadership and gendered leadership styles

This section focuses on leadership in term of women's status and style. It will discuss the history that may have impacted women's leadership perspective and improvement. Furthermore, it will explore how scholars have discussed the relationship between gender and leadership.

Leadership has been seen across history as a male field, while women are expected to be a leader in the domestic front and home (Klenke, 2004). This section presents how the

perspective on women's leadership has improved over history and will discuss the differences between the styles of women and men in the practice and concept of leadership. In addition, women's specific challenges in leadership will be explained.

The role of women in early history was conventionally associated with domestic tasks such as being simply a mother and housewife (Al-Alawi et al., 2021). However, these roles have been changed to outgoing positions (in other words, abilities and roles outside the domestic home) as a result of the feminist movement (Cannon & Clymer, 2020). This movement aimed to seek gender equality through women's rights, and this happened over three stages. The first one occurred during the 1920s where women rejected their traditional role and began fighting for their right to work (Cannon & Clymer, 2020). The well-known feminist Virginia Woolf classified this movement as one in which women were not only searching for equality but also fulfilling their personal needs (Minow-Pinkney, 2010). The second stage occurred between 1960–1980 and concentrated on gender equality in the workplace (Cannon & Clymer, 2020) Finally, the third stage started in the early 1990s and focused on many issues, for instance: the intersection and discrimination of race and gender, gender violence, the gender wage gap, the glass ceiling and unjust maternity leave policies (Cannon & Clymer, 2020).

These movements enhanced the importance of women's role in leadership positions and increased the numbers of women who worked in these positions (Batliwala, 2011). For example, women accounted for 51.4% of managerial positions in 2011 in the USA. However, African American and Asian American women represented only 5.3% and 2.7% of all the managing administration jobs (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). In 2018, in Canada, the number of women in leadership positions increased by one third (35.1%) and 32.6% of senior management. In 2019, 17% of women became CEOs of global stock exchange companies in Europe (Rigolini et al., 2021).

A discussion that is still going on focuses on the subject of whether or not women and men have distinct approaches to leadership (De la Rey, 2005). De la Rey perceives that women's leadership is more effective than men's, and that this is largely because of

traditionally feminine qualities imbedded within women leaders. For example, some of the qualities traditionally associated with women (rather than men) include cooperation, guidance, and initiative (Shen & Joseph, 2021). Nevertheless, other researchers believe that in leadership positions gender is not an important factor, and that it is the appropriate qualifications and requirements that matter to enable one to work as a leader. Therefore, some researchers argue that differences in the management style of men and women may be very small (Fisk & Overton, 2019). However, Eagly (2007) claims that the reasons for the differences in leadership styles between women and men is due to stereotypes in society about the qualities of a leader. Those qualities and stereotypes are completely different from society's beliefs about the characteristics of women, such as: the characteristic of caring for others, kindness, and warmth. Therefore, it could be argued that society prefers men as leaders more than women and accepts their management and the strength of their administration. Women and men behave differently because of the distinct roles they perform due to societal expectations (Eagly, 1987). However, this can lead to women being placed in a more difficult position when they take on leadership positions as they are expected to have societal and leadership qualities similar to those of men (Arami, 2016).

Nevertheless, Eagly and Carli (2012) found that the difference between female and male leadership styles is that the men's style tends to be more autocratic and directed to the task, whilst women are more democratic and directed to the needs of people. Moreover, women leaders perform better than men in the style of transformational leadership, especially in encouraging and supporting employees. In addition, as a leader, women reward employees for their performance at work, and this is considered one of the attributes of transformational leadership. On the other hand, men seem more superior to women in transactional leadership, which includes discipline and corrigendum. However, research has pointed to the strength and effectiveness of women in management more than men (Eagly & Carli, 2012). Nevertheless, Fine et al. (2020) also discuss the importance of organisational gender equality, stressing that the differences in leadership skills between men and women are minor. Waits (2016) commented that women as leaders are distinguished with more emotional intuition and emotional intelligence than

their male peers, which may enhance their leadership qualities in terms of flexibility and problem analysis. Emotional intelligence in leadership has been defined as the ability of a leader to be a catalyst for attitudes and facilitate cooperative relationships between employees (Sadri, 2012). Moreover, research suggests that women leaders perform better than men in the style of transformational leadership, especially when encouraging and supporting employees (Eagly & Carli, 2012). However, Keohane (2020) states that stereotypes about women leaders still exist, such as women managers lacking the dedication and motivation needed to rise to the highest echelons. Additionally, women may not be able to see themselves in leadership positions and may not think they are eligible or good enough for them.

Moreover, White and Ozkanli's (2010) comparative study that examined the differences associated with gender on women leaders in Turkey and Australia found that the number of academic women in Turkey was higher than in Australia. However, there are more Australian women in leadership positions than Turkish women. Turkish women, because of the influence of local traditions, do not associate this with sexism, but tend to believe that leadership positions are more suitable for men according to men's biological nature, which is authoritative. On the other hand, Australian women link the right to leadership positions as a result of transformational leadership style, which is one of the most important elements of change for the better, being more efficient. It has also been noted that Turkish women look for leadership positions because they want to increase their income and social relevance, while Australian women are seeking leadership positions to achieve their organisational goals.

In the Arab world, both Arab men and women demonstrate exceptional abilities in different areas of leadership. Women thrive when being seen as role models, motivating others, stimulating intellectual growth, and providing personalised attention. On the other hand, Arab males excel in transactional leadership skills (Yaseen, 2010).

4.4. Leadership in higher education

It is imperative to commence by comprehending the leadership dynamics within higher

education. This has been a subject of increased scrutiny since the 1980s (Trow, 1985; Esen et al., 2020). This has been accompanied by different factors such as: growth in student numbers, information technology, modifications in budgets for student places, expanded marketisation, and globalisation (Black, 2015).

Furthermore, Kezar et al. (2011) claimed in their book "Rethinking the "L" Word in Higher Education" that leadership in higher education is part of the story for social change and empowering individuals. Therefore, leaders in higher education need to communicate, motivate, and exchange thoughts. Leadership in higher education is about servant and collective leadership instead of control leadership, where this replacement is considered more effective. Additionally, Sulastri et al. (2020) added that effective leadership in higher education extends beyond the scope of conventional management and administrative duties. Competencies like stimulation, empowerment, influence, inspiration, and people development are necessary. In addition, the researcher does not focus any more on presidents of university but on the deans, heads Departments, students, administrators across the universities (Kezar et al., 2011). Due to the fact that leadership in higher education is a multifaceted and intricate phenomenon (Bolden, 2007). The concept encompasses multiple components, such as social capital and social identity, that serve as connections between individual actions and the structure of an organisation (Hassan et al., 2018; Bolden, 2007).

Leaders in higher education, according to Smith and Wolverton (2010), should be skilled in four areas: context, content, process, and communication. To begin, context relates to a leader's understanding of dimensions, patterns, and difficult circumstances. Second, leaders should be well-versed in academia, student affairs, athletics, technology, legal challenges, strategic planning, and goals in terms of content. Third, leaders must have the ability to produce successful outcomes, such as negotiation skills, encouragement, creativity, flexibility, risk-taking attitude, and integrity. Finally, it is important to note that verbal, nonverbal, and written communication abilities are all different communication skills.

Despite all the qualities mentioned and associated with leadership, Chaaban et al. (2023),

in their study, discovered that middle-level managers' leadership in higher education is complex. The hierarchical nature of university management necessitates managers to exhibit both responsibility towards senior management and loyalty towards their academic colleagues within their departments. Therefore, they must strike a balance between these conflicting demands and external standards for implementation and management.

In addition, the subsequent paragraphs will address the additional challenges that women in leadership encounter when seeking higher education in leadership.

4.5. Women's leadership in higher education

For higher education, numerous investigations from different fields have shown how important it is to promote more women to leadership positions. Therefore, these trends of underrepresentation are very concerning (Madsen & Longman, 2020; White, 2003). The McKinsey & Company (2018) *Women in the Workplace* study emphasised how prejudice hinders women's access to a supportive environment and the resources they require to excel in their jobs.

In 2017, women were the leaders of only 18% of the top 200 universities worldwide. In 2016, women accounted for 30% of college presidents, while in the United Kingdom, they constituted 21% (Seale et al., 2021). Several studies have discussed how bias or stereotyping can be invisible, although it is visible in some cultures and organisations (Madsen & Longman, 2020; Savigny, 2014).

Unspoken obstacles that women face due to gender bias in cultural norms and in institutionalised ways of doing things unintentionally favour males (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; King, 2020). Diehl and Dzubinski (2017) highlighted numerous different organisational hurdles that impact the efficacy and impact of women leaders.

Women face injustice based on race or gender. This injustice leads to various obstacles, such as separation from informal connections and restrictions on participation, which also influences the absence of mentoring, sponsorship, and support. In addition, the organisation mistrusts women's self-efficacy because the culture of masculinity permeates the organisation. Also, organisations have male controls on the restriction of admission to the facility, which can place individuals in high-risk roles that entail glass-cliff realities.

Furthermore, women suffer gender-based wage disparity alongside the criteria that women have

to execute more effectively. Further, there is a lack of recognition and earning a place for tokenism. Tokenism has been identified as a situation where individuals are appointed to an organisation on the premise of their dissimilarity from other members; these individuals are frequently women or members of underrepresented groups. One could potentially present this behaviour as "evidence" that the organisation does not engage in discriminatory actions related to tokenism. The emotional well-being of women is significantly impacted by tokenism, leading to unequal attention and performance pressures for female managers.

Moreover, workplace harassment includes a variety of actions designed to provoke, frighten, intimidate, or cause distress, including sabotage, abusive speech, bullying, intimidation, and sexual harassment. Additionally, there is a phenomenon known as "the queen bee effect" that occurs when women do not advocate for other women (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Madsen & Longman, 2020; Zimmer, 2014; Pounder and Coleman, 2002).

In addition, the value of incorporating disparate perspectives into decision-making processes has been well-documented in numerous studies (Madsen & Longman, 2020; Madsen, 2012). According to data from the Association of American Colleges and Universities, women's and leadership positions in higher education improved dramatically between the 1970s and the 2000s. For instance, there has been a substantial improvement in the enrolment and graduation rates of women pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees in the United States and internationally. Women currently make up 24% of full professors, 38% of associate professors, and nearly 50% of assistant professors, according to recent faculty data (Madsen, 2012).

Nevertheless, this still low according to Longman and Madsen (2014). In her book that focused on women, Madsen (2012) claimed that women occupy positions such as vice presidents and senior leaders in 14 sectors of the United States in a proportion of only 19%, while men hold 81% of the roles. Additional distinctions, including salary discrepancies and performance indicators, were also incorporated into the study.

Further, in India, gender disparity is a prevalent issue in Indian higher education,

especially in the fields of science and technology. A study conducted by Kameshwara and Shukla (2017) revealed that women encounter socio-cultural obstacles, especially in fields that are predominantly male dominated. The gendered private-public dichotomy in India perpetuates the underrepresentation of women in various professions. Insufficient resources, money, and educational possibilities additionally impede women's involvement (Longman, 2018).

Another example is that in South Africa, women still face patriarchal cultures that hinder them from aspiring to leadership positions in higher education. Seale et al. (2021) revealed in her study that South African women face various obstacles such as gender bias, lack of support, isolation, low self-esteem, and promotions of one size. All of this is the result of the integration of a complex relationship between patriarchal culture and the structure of organisation in South African universities. Women need to be allowed to be empowered in higher positions, and development programmes have been recommended to motivate them to overcome these obstacles.

One of the main issues for stereotypes against women in leadership in higher education has been highlighted by Fuller (2014) and is known as gendered leadership performance. Leadership as an act should have no gender but women face criticism when they show characteristics such as being decisive and having self-confidence. Also, if a woman's body language shows assertiveness, she will be seen as a masculine woman. This stereotype limits women from behaving as leaders representing their own true selves. In particular, educational leadership has a culture in which incentives and penalties are used as a primary instrument for regulations such as control, attrition, and change, so women leaders need to distinguish themselves through different characteristics.

Furthermore, this stereotype has influenced how women adapt their leadership style. Thus, among the many controversial topics, gender difference in leadership style is discussed in different fields such as administration, politics, and education. In particular, a study conducted by Mulawarman and Komariyah (2021) focused on women and leadership styles in school management and found that women followed a democratic leadership style. On the other hand, a study by Cuadrado et al. (2012) found that employees rate women leaders as more autocratic and willing to negotiate than men. However, leaders were also classified with regards to being

stereotypically feminine or masculine. In addition, male supervisors are more frequently commended by subordinates than female supervisors, whereas female supervisors are more frequently held accountable for unfavourable work outcomes (Pounder & Coleman, 2002).

Pounder and Coleman (2002) have found no statistically significant variations in the characteristics and skills of male and female managers and professionals when it comes to leadership style. The foundation of this perspective is stereotyping, which frequently harms women by insinuating they lack leadership capabilities comparable to men. Since most people assume that a leader will be a man, women's experiences in leadership roles are often drastically different from men. According to Valentine and Godkin (2000), there is a lot of research that shows women experience societally imposed gender stereotypes that make it hard for them to be credible leaders in organisations.

On the other hand, stereotypes do not necessarily benefit male managers at the cost of female managers. Recent research on female principals in the United Kingdom indicated that while these women were aware of their gender, they also felt liberated from the limitations imposed by stereotypically male leadership roles (Pounder & Coleman, 2002).

In summary, leadership in higher education plays a crucial role in driving societal transformation. Therefore, the presence and performance of women in leadership positions hold great importance for both society and education. Despite this, women occupying management positions still encounter a range of challenges, both overt and covert, including gender-based discrimination and barriers to participation stemming from the loss of informal networks, lack of mentorship, sponsorship, and support, an organization-wide culture that reinforces masculinity, and preconceived notions and scepticism regarding women.

All these obstacles have been presented in the existing research. This has led to an exploration of how they influence women's leadership styles. Some scholars differentiate between men and women's leadership styles by increasing stereotypes about women, stating that women tend to have a democratic style while men tend to have a more influential style, such as transactional. Nevertheless, several researchers said leadership has no gender and that it is more about experiences and personalities.

They also mentioned that organisations have a significant influence on how leaders manage, regardless of their gender (Martinez-Leon et al., 2020; Shen & Joseph, 2021; Miranda, 2019).

4.6. Organisational culture

Organisational culture is one of the factors that influences how employees behave (Al-Bahussin & El-Garaihy, 2013; Smircich, 1983; Wilson, 2001). However, it has been argued that the definition of organisational culture is equivocal due to the absence of a singular approach; rather, it encompasses a collection of concepts, values, and elements that are interconnected and occasionally intersect, and which may influence the conduct of a group or an individual in the workplace (Al-Bahussin & El-Garaihy, 2013).

However, in the context of exploring and understanding organisational culture, Smircich (1983) reviewed the philosophical concepts to assess how researchers can investigate the culture of the organisations in question. He stated that the organisational culture can be researched in terms of the social reality that exists within the institution, or it can be explored in terms of the organism and physical features of the organisation that enhance things like accomplishing tasks, experiences, and so on. Moreover, organisational culture can be defined in accordance with a number of variables, including the sector, geographical area, interactions and personalities of employees, and recurring patterns, according to Mohelska and Sokolova (2015). In addition, in a wide variety of organisational contexts, researchers use their intervention strategy to draw maps that illustrate how norms, expectations, and preconceptions ensnare individuals in destructive behaviour patterns (Wilson, 2001; Smircich, 1983).

Additionally, Bandura identifies the organisation as one of the factors that can influence a person's level of self-efficacy, which is a theory that was implemented in this qualitative study to explore the organisational culture that surrounded Saudi academic leaders, and how its level of responsiveness influences their behaviours (Bandura, 1999; Mohr, 2018).

In defining organisational culture behaviours, Wilson (2001) identified three distinct

categories:

- The integration perspective: belonging to a culture that promotes unity via shared ideals fosters loyalty.
- The differentiation perspective: there may be distinct cultures that are indifferent to, at odds with, or compatible to one another; these groups may be associated with various occupations, social strata, genders, and financial levels.
- The fragmentation perspective: a world where uncertainty reigns and patterns of taking decisions are subject to change based on external factors.

Further, Tedla (2016) categorises organisational culture into two distinct types: weak and strong. In a strong organisational culture, employees agree on values and goals, adapt quickly to new employees, agree with management decisions and believe in the importance of their role in implementation, which affects performance and job satisfaction. A weak organisational culture, conversely, gives rise to internal discord and disagreements among members regarding the objectives and priorities of senior management. This is primarily attributed to challenges in communicating and providing direction, which hinder employees from comprehending and defining values. Consequently, the organisation is vulnerable to potential losses and failures.

The physical structure and employee interactions are not the only factors influencing organisational culture; the country's culture can also have an impact. It impacts employee responses and interactions and how the beneficiary contributes to the development of the organisation. As an example, on research on organisational culture in Vietnam, Tran (2021) explained that due to the country's high uncertainty avoidance that indicates the degree to which a community is anxious about the future, citizens who feel threatened tend to postpone making critical decisions (Phan, 2017). They concur with the Chinese that a strong vertical relationship between leaders and followers produces an individual who is held in high esteem by society and inspires belief and admiration. This influences the work culture of the organisation in Vietnam, as individuals instil these values and desire the continuation of vertical management. In addition, as this study focuses on Saudi higher education, the following chapter will present how social values influence Saudi women's positions in the workplace.

Furthermore, the culture of the organisation, such as staff collaboration, achievements, job satisfaction, and well-being, has an impact on the employees' performance level and emotional level (Tran, 2021; Garcia et al., 2017). Moreover, organisational culture influences and is influenced by its leader's or leaders' behaviours. As stated by Akanji et al. (2020), the leadership of an organisation has a significant impact on shaping its culture, and vice versa. There is a correlation between the leadership style of individuals in charge and the degree to which their organisations' cultures are hierarchical, patriarchal, obedient, and interdependent. In addition, a leader's cognitive style, ethics, interpersonal skills, and leadership style (whether charismatic, authoritarian, or transformational) are all influenced by the culture of the organisation (Alhalafi, 2022).

Moreover, Hudea (2019) noted that there are several facets which may affect leaders, which could reflect on their behaviours in the workplace, or how they deal with their employees: for example, this could be the place where the leader has to work, the conditions that force the leader to use certain administrative styles, or the values and ethics of the leader. The leader's personality also that could prefer method more than other in administrative behaviours. Finally, the coincidences that could change the leader's behaviours by teaching him/her a lesson, which build on experiences by different circumstances (Blake & Mouton, 1964).

Therefore, this thesis investigates in part how an organisation's culture—as perceived by the participants—is predicated on leadership style.

4.7. Conclusion

This second chapter of the literature review in this study has presented leadership definitions and functions and theories of leadership styles across time. Further, together with their impact, it has explored challenges to leadership in higher education and women's leadership, and organisational culture philosophy and definitions.

To summarise, leadership is a perpetual cycle in which a leader demonstrates proficiency in overseeing personnel, objectives, and tasks that span multiple dimensions in order to realise the vision of the organisation. Furthermore, in the realm of higher education,

leadership entails the responsibility of overseeing a multitude of elements, including budget adjustments for student spaces, IT advancements, and the expansion of student numbers. Different leaders have implemented different leadership practices, such as democratic, transformational, transactional, and autocratic, amongst others.

Historically, women in leadership positions have been subject to severe stereotypes that have affected their access to such positions, experience, self-perception, equity, salary disparities, judgement of their conduct, and more. However, numerous studies have confirmed that there is no discernible gender-based disparity in leadership; rather, such differences can be attributed to the unique challenges and judgements that women encounter in comparison to men. The chapter concludes with a discussion of organisational culture and how researchers can analyse it based on the beliefs, emotions, and attitudes of employees. Furthermore, an analysis may also be conducted based on the organisation's structure, including its industry association or line of goods. The organisation is considered one of the factors investigated in this thesis in an effort to comprehend the behaviour of Saudi academic women.

Chapter 5: Research design

5. Introduction

The major purpose of this chapter is to discuss the philosophical and methodological framework used in this study, which is the self-efficacy of Saudi Arabia's female heads of departments and deans and how it influences their leadership. Explaining the conceptual framework leads to an understanding of the requirements of this research. Therefore, this chapter will explain the epistemology, ontology, methods chosen and the justification for the choices, illustrating the interview process, presenting the pilot study, explaining how the data was collected and analysed, and my positionality and reflexivity. In addition, the chapter will present the ethical considerations that have been followed to conduct this research.

5.1. Research paradigm

According to Mertler (2024) educational research comprises of four types of research such as empirical research, historical research, theoretical research, and conceptual-philosophical research. However, this study focuses mostly on empirical research. Due to the nature of my research topics, which require in-depth data on lived experiences, I have chosen a qualitative approach. This approach allows for a thorough examination of the participants' life experiences, providing a wealth of insightful data (Mertler, 2024; Mohajan, 2018). In order to have a deeper understanding of the subject, a qualitative approach has been chosen to response to the research questions. This project adopts an interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm is concerned with the individuals' perceptions in various situations and how this might occur (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). This philosophical framework for research asserts that people are fundamentally different from physical phenomena, leading to more diverse interpretations (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). Cultures, conditions, and eras are taken into account as factors that contribute to various realities in society. By gaining a rich awareness of Saudi culture, I am able to see how this cultural context influences the decisions, beliefs, and other aspects of Saudi women's lives. In addition, assuming that reality is subjective and can vary depending on the person being considered (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Therefore, this research is going to interpret Saudi women academic leaders' leadership self-efficacy

and how that relates to their beliefs, organisations, and leadership style. Also, by recognising that each participant in my study possesses their own unique reality, the analysis can be enriched, leading to an in-depth understanding of the responses to the research questions. Additionally, this paradigm is distinguished by the use of rich data, such as interviews, which may include texts, images, videos, and music, to explain and understand various opinions and experiences (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

However, this specific research philosophy has been chosen due to the nature of the ontology and epistemology. Ontology is the study of the form and essence of reality (Ejnavarzala, 2019). Furthermore, "social ontology" has been defined as a philosophical discussion in studies about the nature of social beings (Moon & Blackman, 2017). As an example, we do not know if these social realities are inherent social standards that arise from people's actions, thoughts, and understandings in society or if they are objective facts that exist independently of human circumstances (Moon & Blackman, 2014). My ontological position is relying on the truth and facts that are produced by participants' interpretations, although I am conscious of the fact that there is no one truth (Hamati-Ataya, 2018; Moon & Blackman, 2017). I will be structuring the knowledge that I generate by conducting interviews with academic leaders (heads of departments and deans) in Saudi higher education to analyse their perspectives on the work culture, experience, and daily responsibilities, among other things. The existing reality is the result of a sequence of societal and personal events in their careers. As a researcher, I seek to discover how they see their own realities and how affects their self-efficacy. It is important to note that each interviewee builds their own reality, and no two people's realities are identical (Ejnavarzala, 2019).

Furthermore, the field of study known as epistemology seeks to answer questions about the nature of knowledge, the nature of legitimate knowledge claims, the reasoning behind these claims, and the relationships between subjects and objects. To be more specific, epistemology is the study of different theories regarding knowing (Ejnavarzala, 2019; Scauso, 2020). In addition, the epistemology is concerned with the methodologies employed by scholars in their ongoing search for knowledge and the assessment of the validity of the information they obtain (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013; Ejnavarzala, 2019). Moreover, my epistemological position of gaining reality is subjective since this study attempts to

gain knowledge solely from participants' interpretations, understandings, and experiences (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Consequently, I interpreted the knowledge that I acquired from the responses of my participants, literatures and theory, and self-reflection. This followed both the deductive and inductive approach to knowledge acquisition. This framework is methodically arranged and used to undertake cross-sectional analysis, which includes data description and abstraction (Goldsmith, 2021).

5.2. Research design and research methodology

Generally, there are three main research methodologies in social science and educational research: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research (Leavy, 2022). The qualitative consists of non-numerical methods that aim to study human interactions and experiences, whereas quantitative methods focus on measurement and numbers, and aim to investigate the potential relationship between phenomena and variables. Mixed methods integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches by gathering both quantitative and qualitative data in one research study (Baškarada & Koronios, 2018).

This research was designed with the application of a qualitative approach, because an in-depth understanding and detailed description are acquired through an emphasis on the fundamental principles, processes, and consequences of the behaviour, phenomenon, or structure under investigation (Husbands *et al.*, 2017). Further, it has been confirmed that the social sciences lend themselves to qualitative research designs which centre on explaining occurrences and gaining fundamental understanding (Mohajan, 2018). Qualitative approach will allow me as researcher to investigate the in-depth details to understand women in my sample, their feelings, their words working lives, and associated issues.

This approach applies social cognitive theory self-efficacy by Bandura that was originally published in 1977 (Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2020). The following section will highlight the significance of applying the theory.

5.3. Theory role

This research follows a theory-driven approach in analysing the data. Scientists contend that by drawing on social theory, they can become more knowledgeable to crucial

processes, interpretations, and concerns that they would have missed while employing an inductive methodology (MacFarlane and O'Reilly-de Brún, 2012). It can also improve qualitative research that aims to test or further explain existing questions (MacFarlane and O'Reilly-de Brún, 2012).

The theory of self-efficacy was applied in this research for two primary reasons. First, the theory's structure, which enhancing understanding of individuals' behaviour and second, the theory's significance in leadership. In terms of the structure, the theory of self-efficacy stands out from other behavioural theories that have shown measures of their own construction (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). The fact that self-efficacy theory classifies performance into three distinct levels (low, medium, and high) according to an individual's perspective, enhances the validity of assessing one's task performance (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Additionally, the self-efficacy theory investigates personal behaviours relating to multiple dimensions that may have an influence, as presented in the fourth chapter, such as beliefs and organisations (Skaalvik, 2020). Thus, the theory in this analysis approach can affords in-depth understanding and analyses to the findings.

Furthermore, Zulkosky (2009) pointed out the significance of the self-efficacy theory in studying leaders who are involved in shaping and adjusting policies, goals, and plans. He said that applying self-efficacy theory in leadership plays a crucial role in comprehending leaders and their actions, as well as contributing to their growth and advancement. Applying the self-efficacy theory to the investigation will enable this study to integrate the theory's structure and leadership aspects, providing a comprehensive analysis of Saudi women's leadership.

5.4. Research questions

Following an in-depth comprehension to the theory, the research has been formed; and the research questions, on the other hand, alongside the research processes that were carried out, have been written in order to accommodate qualitative findings.

As explained in the previous chapter, the primary focus of self-efficacy theory is understanding individual behaviour. Additionally, three main assertions underpin leadership self-efficacy: what generates and enhances it, how their beliefs underpin it,

and how their working environments mediate it. The research questions have therefore been divided according to these premises.

1. To what extent are sources of leadership self-efficacy (experiences, training, role models, influence of emotions, verbal effect) available to Saudi academic women leaders in their workplace, from their perspective?
2. How do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?
3. How do the environmental work types (responsiveness, unresponsiveness, and semi-responsiveness) influence Saudi academic women's leaders' leadership styles?

After analysis, I was able to find in-depth themes for each question. For instance, in response to the first question about the origins of leadership self-efficacy, I discovered that training and role models serve as representations of vicarious experience. Furthermore, the second section will provide further insights into method construction.

5.5. Method constructed

This method builds upon the theoretical framework elements; in addition, a number of sources were reviewed that enhanced the building and improved the questions of the interviews (Ng & Chan, 2008; Bobbio & Manganelli, 2009; Versland, 2016; Alotaibi, 2020; Hagan & Olivier, 2022). To explain: the first question was enhanced based on Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy theory (mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and psychological states) (Versland, 2016). The second research question was improved by employing the method of (Hagan & Olivier, 2022) study on women's self-efficacy in American universities. Furthermore, (Alotaibi, 2020) findings were included in this study, which are connected to Saudi women's difficulties and empowerment, which can enhance understanding the influential of their leadership self-efficacy. The research's third question was improved by combining techniques from many studies, including as (Hagan & Olivier, 2022). In addition, Bobbio and Manganelli (2009) analysed various LSE scales and determined the key components of effective leadership. Effective leaders possess a change-oriented mindset, the ability to select followers and delegate responsibilities, strong communication and interpersonal

relationship skills, self-awareness, self-confidence, and motivation, and a strategic focus on achieving harmony and unity among teammates.

Further, a pilot study was carried out as will be outlined in the requisite section (Malmqvist et al., 2019). The interviews consisted of 21 open-ended questions that were constructed to allow me to answer the research questions (see appendix 1). The table (3) below shows how the interview questions are structured in relation to the research questions.

Research questions	Related Interview questions
1.To what extent are sources of leadership self-efficacy (experiences, training, Influence of emotions, verbal effect) available to Saudi academic women leaders in their workplace, from their perspective?	1/3/6/9 Example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As you may be aware, some organizations provide their employees with a variety of training opportunities relevant to their job: How can you locate training courses at your university or outside that are relevant to your leadership role? Could you tell me about your job and qualifications from undergraduate to now?
2.How do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?	2/4 Example: As a (Dean/Head department) Did you aspire to this role? why or why not?
3.How do the environmental work types (responsiveness, unresponsiveness, and semi-responsiveness) influence Saudi academic women's leaders' leadership styles?	5/7/10/11/12/13/14/15/16/17/18/19/20/21 Example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally: How would you describe the work climate at a university? How do you ensure that your plans and goals are being implemented, how do you manage your staff?

Table 3: interview questions.

5.6. Data sources

The four public universities are sited in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's capital, where the sample has been collected for this research. The four governmental universities are distinguished by various structural characteristics, including women-only, mixed, and two gender-segregated universities. I chose a sample from several public universities in Riyadh,

eliminating private ones. The reason for this is that they all adhere to the same system and government rules, allowing this study to better evaluate the impact of the organisation and other elements that may influence leadership self-efficacy. The names of the universities will not be presented by the building structure to maintain anonymity and confidentiality for the research participants, the ethical procedure will be discussed later. In addition, the scope of this investigation was limited to women. The women faculty members who took part in this research project have held positions such as dean and head of department. In the participants' section, additional information will be provided. The data collection took three months to complete and that was due to respondent availability and time. Zoom and Microsoft Teams were used to conduct all possible participants to take part in the online interviews.

5.7. Participants

This study's selected sample are from different universities in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. The data was collected by snowball procedure which is that the collection was through participants recommended by other participants (Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2020). One of the most prominent techniques used in qualitative research, the snowball sample is a technique that relies on networking and referrals. In the beginning, researchers typically extend invitations to a limited number of initial contacts who meet the predetermined criteria of the study. Subsequently, the consenting participants are requested to suggest other acquaintances who satisfy the research requirements and have the potential to be amenable participants as well. These individuals, in turn, promote additional prospective participants, and so forth (Parker et al., 2019; Dosek, 2021). For example, I interviewed one of the participants, who works at a women-only university, and then asked her to give me with contact information for colleagues in departments she might know. Next, she gave me more than four phone numbers for various department heads. However, not all of them replied yes; in fact, I only received a "yes" from one respondent, and I repeated the process with new participant after the interview.

Scholars has identified the pros and cons for snowball techniques (Parker et al., 2019; Sharma, 2017). The benefits when populations are difficult to reach, pros are easily accessible. It was difficult for me to access because I am an outsider to the organisations, and it was a time when life was slowly returning due to Covid 19 restrictions. Furthermore, I do not have any connections, making it more difficult to discover people who can provide me time for my study without recommendation. But according to Triandis (1995) and Hofstede (1980), the Middle East is characterised as a "collectivist culture" in which the distinction between individuals belonging to the community and outsiders is more noticeable. This could help to explain the success of participant recruitment strategies used in this study, such as gatekeeping and snowballing, in which participants find new participants while gatekeepers seek for members of their own group. On the other hand, it has been stated that this is one of the disadvantages because participants' secret information is sensitive and they do not feel comfortable recommending anyone (Parker et al., 2019). There were three participants in my study who asked me more than twice about confidentiality, and they did not recommend names.

A total of 21 interviews were carried out by the researcher, with three being used as a pilot study. In the analysis and discussion chapter, the focus is on the other eighteen participants. Deans and department heads are the participants' titles. The number of sample size was determined by reviewing various qualitative research articles on Saudi women's leadership and self-efficacy, whose sample size was respectively 12-15-26 (Alotaibi, 2020; Alghofaily, 2019). However, indicators of high-quality research do not invariably revolve around the total number of respondents. Rather, when evaluating quality, one should pay attention to the data's appropriateness, depth, and richness, as well as whether or not the data sufficiently answer the research questions when processed (Stenfors et al., 2020). The number of replies to this study allowed for greater variety and a more in-depth comprehension of the research issues.

The demographic information of the participants is presented in the table 4 below, which represents four separate government universities in Riyadh.

Universities type	P (No)	Total P	Title	Qualifications	Prior experience in leadership	Total experience years
Gender-segregated A	4	5	Dean	PhD	Yes	12
Gender-segregated A	6		Head department	PhD	No	3
Gender-segregated A	7		Head department	PhD	No	1.5
Gender-segregated A	15		Head department for (men and women) sections	PhD	Yes	3
Gender-segregated A	20		Head department	PhD	Yes	10
Gender-segregated B	9	4	Head department	PhD	Yes	4
Gender-segregated B	11		Dean	PhD	Yes	3
Gender-segregated B	13		Head department	PhD	Yes	16
Gender-segregated B	18		Dean for (men and women) sections	PhD	Yes	22
Mixed	5	3	Head department	PhD	No	3
Mixed	8		Head department	PhD	No	2.5
Mixed	10		Dean	PhD	Yes	4
Women-only	12	6	Dean	PhD	Yes	9
Women-only	14		Head department	PhD	Yes	10
Women-only	16		Head department	PhD	No	1
Women-only	17		Head department	PhD	Yes	20
Women-only	19		Head department	PhD	Yes	5
Women-only	21		Dean	PhD	Yes	7

Table 4: Participants' data.

5.8. Semi-structured interviews

This research uses qualitative approach which employs an individual interview (semi-structured). It is a tool used for the participants to answer the research questions. Interviews are a great way to get people to open up about their thoughts and experiences through conversation, which can yield a wealth of information (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). In addition, in-depth expertise in research can be enhanced through interviews, according to multiple studies (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Kallio *et al.*, 2016).

As a researcher, I have a preference for gaining a deeper understanding of individuals by analysing their own perspectives and experiences. In this thesis, which is primarily motivated by personal experience, interviews enabled me to gain a fuller understanding of women's behaviours and the ways in which they have been impacted by a multitude of factors (Eppich *et al.*, 2019). In the following paragraph, the stages of the interviews will be presented.

Interviews procedures:

1) Pre-interview stage:

The interview questions were translated to Arabic language which was the main language of the sample. After that research followed the snowball technique to collect the primary sample (Ruiz-Fernández *et al.*, 2021). Next, contacting the participants, after their approval gain, I set a suitable time and date for online interviews using Microsoft teams, before which the consent form and participant information sheets were sent by email. However, not all of them were able to make it at the certain time, there were a few of them who delayed the interviews ten minutes before the exact time. Therefore, I waited for them to find a space for the interview in their diaries.

2) During the Interview Stage:

The researchers started a pleasant conversation (hellos, self-introduction), which included nonverbal communication such as eye contact and facial expressions. In order to achieve a more natural response, it is critical to establish a good rapport with the respondents before asking the interview questions (Abbe & Brandon, 2013). In addition, the participants' interviews were recorded online following the ethical procedures that the ethics section will provide information on. The interviews each took from 40 to 50 minutes. Finally, the interviewees were asked for feedback and recommendations on the interview questions by the researcher.

Moreover, in practical interviews, there were different situation when I did the interviews with my participants. For example, in one of them she ended up calling

me from her car park at her house, she was inside her car, and she told me “I am a mother for teenagers, where I cannot find a quiet place at my house to do the interview, and I know how this can be valuable for you as research and that’s why I said I will help you and accepted to be part of this study”. This extra effort from her, where sometimes she was opening the door of the car to check her family and return to me was really appreciated. In addition, there were also other examples where some of their interviews were interrupted by their families and online connection. But everything in the end went smoothly.

During doing the interviews I noticed how some of the respondents were also excited to share their experience, while one of the participants was more cautious. She asked me several times *for whom you are doing this research?* and I assured her that I am sponsored and shared with her personal information that contributed to building the trust.

In the end, I am grateful to have this experience meeting different women, listened to their professional experience that enrich my knowledge, experience, and my personal growth.

3) Post-Interview Stage:

At this point, the data from the interview were transcribed. However, converting audio recordings into written form is a laborious and time-consuming process (Denscombe, 2017). Two to three hours of labour are typically required to transcribe an hour of interview audio into written form. I transcribed the first five participants in manual way but then I employed the Maestra app that serves several languages, Arabic among them, and followed the ethical procedures in protecting and privacy of the information. Following that, coding techniques and themes were developed in accordance with the study questions (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher then translated the data to be discussed in the report.

Translation procedures: the study followed back-translation procedures which reverses the process of translating from English to Arabic, and you keep going until you

get an accurate representation of the original (Klotz et al., 2023). Following that, to ensure accuracy and validate its effectiveness, the researcher had two expert bilingual translators review it and apply the change (Chen & Boore, 2010; Son, 2018). However, there were some challenges to translate from Arabic to English related to an idiomatic expression or more than one meaning. For example:

The original sentence by P10:

"لو اتصل على الموظف وقت دوامه يرد علي حتى لو كان فوق القمر، هذي مسؤوليته و هو لازم يعملها مدام انه في نهاية الاسبوع عنده اجازة و لا يرد علي خلالها"

The technique's tool: it was back-translation technique.

The initial translation: It is me, as a researcher, who can speak the two languages (Arabic and English).

Back Translator: A Saudi translator who has bachelor's degree in English translations from King Saud university and has experience in translation services.

Reviewers: It was done by two translators who provided the service of translation online for accuracy and review only.

However, to show the challenges, the direct translation for the Arabic text above as follow:

"If I call the employee at his shift, he has to answers me even if he is over the moon, this is his responsibility, and he must do it as long as he has a vacation at the end of the week and does not answer me during it".

"Over the moon" is an idiomatic term in English that signifies very joyful or delighted (Cambridge, 2024). While in this Arabic text it is symbolic of the impossible, which means I do not care about the place or circumstance of the employee, he must answer the call.

Here, the translation role was to transfer the correct meaning from the participants'

voices to English academic research.

The themes that have been studied, on the other hand, were derived from a variety of interview questions, and this was the case regardless of the focus of the study question. The data analysis section will provide more details on these points; however, this thesis will firstly cover the methods and outcomes of the pilot study.

5.9. The pilot test methods

This study conducted a pilot study to assess the interview questions and theoretical framework in analysis. The objective of the pilot study is to guarantee that the methods and queries are precise, and effectively capture the perspectives of participants, thereby enhancing the research's credibility. Furthermore, it enhances the study's dependability by identifying and resolving any issues that may arise during the research process, thereby guaranteeing that the approach is consistent and robust (Malmqvist *et al.*, 2019; Stewart *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, another primary goal of doing a pilot study is to determine if any changes need to be made to the research questions or methods to enhance the likelihood of collecting high quality data that relates to the aims of the project (Malmqvist *et al.*, 2019). Also, the pilot study helps this study to understand how theoretical framework can work for analysis data.

The pilot study has tested the theory and the interview as a method for this thesis. This pilot study conducted in 2021 before starting the main stage of data collection. According to Vogel & Draper-Rodi (2017), a well-defined plan can be produced with the aid of a pilot study. Therefore, the pilot study in this study allows me to plan well by examining the interview questions and the theoretical framework for analysis. The research questions asked were a little bit different due to rich analysis on the final data and the pilot study outcomes. Here are the former research questions:

1. What are their sources of self-efficacy?
2. To what extent do limitations influence their perceptions of themselves as Saudi women in leadership positions?
3. To what extent do they feel fully able to perform their roles?
4. To what extent do they see change in Saudi Arabia as promoting their self-

efficacy?

The number of **participants** in the pilot study is three, and the following table presents the details.

No	Positions	Qualifications	General Experience	Management\Leadership Experience
P1	Academic leader	PhD	8 years	Zero
P2	Academic leader	PhD	10 years	2 years
P3	Academic leader	PhD	17 years	4-5 years

Table 5: Pilot study participants

Data Analysis and Findings of the pilot study:

Research codes and themes can be developed through the theory-driven approach, which is considered a common approach. That is because there is a possibility that the interpretations and expressions of the components of the theory are unique, and that can add to a more in-depth understanding of the researcher's field (Karunasena & Deng, 2011). This section will provide an overview of the pilot study, focusing solely on the first research question and the thematic elements associated with the remaining research questions. Then, it will present the changes that happened due to that.

The analysis of the pilot study identified the themes and sub-themes of **the first research question as below:**

What are their sources of self-efficacy?				
Themes	Training	Experience	Emotional state	Verbal effect
Sub-themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disappointing courses\courses No training Limited/ Not related	No preparations No experience Not enough No need	Routine, boring Negative emotions Pressure	Work words Timetable Meetings Curriculum

Table 6: Themes from the Pilot Study – Question 1

The qualitative findings for the interview question related to Research Question no (1); in terms of training, Saudi academic leaders have no or very limited training related to their role at all. P2 commented that “she had only one [experience of training], but it was very disappointing”. P1 confirmed that “I had two courses but have no relation at all with the management role”.

Moving to the experience, P1 confirmed that her previous experience has no relation with this position, and she considered her leadership role as:

It is a big jump between my previous experience and this one

On the other hand, P2 answered that she had previous experience and it really benefitted her in some tasks although she still thought it is not enough and she need more knowledge in leadership. P3 answered that there is no need for experience at all, leadership depends on your personality more than experience:

When I am leading the same faculty of my subject, the leader here does not need courses, and we have an example for one experiment had failed were they hire in leadership role leaders have business management qualification, they were not able to make the suitable decision.

Moving to the emotional state and verbal effects as a source in the workplace - although verbal persuasion and emotional emotions are the least effective methods to increase self-efficacy, there is still a correlation when one hears from others and feels that it can help overcome a barrier (Hagan & Olivier, 2022). They were all highly negative sentiments and described it as boring to a deadly level, negative emotions, and pressure. P1 described that by saying:

The work atmosphere is routine, boring to the point of death, and I was counting down the days until the year ended, especially because it was Corona, everyone does not want to take responsibility and make a decision in such a situation and there was a lack of cooperation.

In term of verbal effects, all participants mentioned that they were only talked to about

daily tasks such as timetable, Meetings, and curriculum. In this case, they did not mention any specific criticism, praise, or encouragement in the workplace.

To summarise, all participants lacked all sources of self-efficacy except the experience of one of them.

The second question in this report is: To what extent do limitations influence their perceptions of themselves as Saudi women in leadership positions? Self-efficacy theory suggests that belief is the most significant factor that affect one's performance (Anderson et al., 2008). The findings reached the main themes as stated in the following:

Main theme	Obtaining positions	Challenges
Sub theme	Nomination Non- renewal Promotion denied Extensive experience	Unchangeable Male dominance

Table 7: Second question, pilot study themes

The third question is: To what extent do they feel fully able to perform their roles?

This leads to two main themes: responsive environment and unresponsive one, as in table 8:

Unresponsive environment	Responsive environment
Demotivating environment Intangible\ emotional pressure Extra hours work Male dominance Lack of penalties and incentives.	Decisions are participatory Changeable Decisions are participatory

Table 8: Pilot study, themes of the third question

The final question was: To what extent do they see change in Saudi Arabia as promoting their self-efficacy?

The participants expressed that they are not yet in a stage of talking about Vision 2030, as it still under the process. In addition, they recommended questions related to Vision 2030 and current change can make participants not comfortable in expressing their feelings. Therefore, this research question has been deleted.

Changes to the research after the pilot study:

There were a few amendments to the research after conducting and analysing the data:

- Small changes to the interview questions to make it clearer for the participants.
- Modifying the second research question according to the results from: to what extent do limitations influence their perceptions of themselves as Saudi women in leadership positions, to: how do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?
- Deleting the fourth research question because it is a sensitive topic in Saudi Arabia and participants will not feel comfortable talking about it.

However, the pilot study supports completing the process of conducting the interviews and enhances the in-depth understanding of the theory of this research. In addition, the pilot study results have been published as a long paper at the 5th International Conference on Teaching, Learning, and Education under the title "How can organisational culture influence the self-efficacy of female Saudi leaders in higher education? (Pilot study) (Alhalafi, 2022).

5.10. Data analyses

Following the completion of data collection, the next critical stage involved their evaluation and analysis, which paved the way for their interpretation and discussion. This study utilized reflexive thematic coding analysis (TA), originally established by Braun and Clarke (2006) which is an important tool in qualitative research because it is an adaptable method to understand individuals' living scenarios, viewpoints, and behaviors. Also, it enables researchers to uncover, analyse, and report patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013; 2019).

Furthermore, (TA) is applicable for both inductive and deductive investigations, including

both obvious and underlying meanings. For instance, it has been used in theory-driven methodology to examine the benefits of positive psychology in anthropological data related to African traditional religions. In addition, as an inductive methodology to comprehend the experiences of individuals (Karatsareas, 2022; Braun and Clarke,2022).

The phases of the analysing process for the data followed Braun and Clarke (2019) as below:

	Phases	Procedures
1.	Familiarising myself with the dataset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process of reading transcripts and recordings involves a deep understanding of the data, allowing for the exploration of analytic ideas and insights.
2.	Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding involves systematically identifying relevant data segments for a research question, applying code labels to capture single meanings or concepts, and systematically coding the entire dataset for each code.
3.	Generating initial themes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process of identifying themes in data involves constructing clusters of codes based on shared patterned meanings.
4.	Developing and reviewing themes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review of themes in relation to the full dataset is crucial for assessing the initial fit and viability of the analysis. It involves considering the character of each theme, its scope, and the relationship with existing knowledge.
5.	Refining, defining and naming themes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The analysis phase involves refining the story of each theme, ensuring it aligns with the overall data narrative, and identifying key concepts for further development.
6.	Writing the paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writing process in TA involves early writing, formal writing, and editing to create a

coherent narrative and compelling data extracts, ensuring persuasive research report.

Table 9: analysing process

- Familiarising myself with the data:

The process of immersing oneself in audio data involves reading and re-reading recordings and transcripts and making brief notes to gain insights into the dataset's content (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2022). As a researcher, I began familiarising myself with the data during the initial interview stage. The interviews with the collected sample were an audio recording that was transcribed later. To double-check the transcripts and fill in any gaps, I re-listened to the recordings. Moreover, the field notes taken after ending the interview included issues such as the researcher's impressions and some memories. In a qualitative study, field notes urge the researcher to interact with and observe the study's sample and environment. It additionally enables researchers to evaluate and identify biases. Furthermore, it helps to expand the richness of the data. This improves the study's rigour and dependability (Phillippi and Lauderdale, 2018).

Following each interview, I diligently recorded my personal impressions of both the participant and the interview as a whole. This practice proved invaluable in analysing the transcriptions and enhancing my overall analysis. In addition, during the transcriptions such as silences, and emotions occurred that provide the voiced words with a more profound meaning (Denscombe, 2017). Pauses and silence helped me realise the in-depth feelings for some challenges, such as verbal and emotional influences.

Additionally, I familiarised myself with the data through repeat reading the transcriptions in order to gain an understanding of it and uncover any underlying meaning (Denscombe, 2017). These steps allowed me to engage more deeply with the material, facilitating the identification of patterns and meanings. This process enhanced the quality and scope of

the data collected. By highlighting language relevant to my research questions, I was able to establish initial codes, which were later developed into themes.

- **Coding:**

TA involves systematically coding data to identify relevant segments for a research question. This includes applying descriptive labels to capture single meanings or concepts. Coding aims to capture analytic take on the data, focusing on explicit and implicit meanings. The process involves collating code labels and compiling relevant data segments (Braun & Clarke, 2006 ;2013; 2019).

Next, the data was stored in the ATLAS software package designed for qualitative data analysis (Woolf & Silver, 2017), to enhance coding and find the relations between patterns. It is argued that utilising software for qualitative data analysis offers several benefits, including time savings, reduced reliance on handwriting, enhanced flexibility in managing substantial volumes of qualitative data, improved accuracy, and data preservation. Although there are drawbacks, enhanced demands placed on researchers to prioritise quantity and scope over profundity and significance, investment of time and effort in acquiring proficiency in computer software, and diversion from the primary task of analysis (Freitas et al., 2022; John & Johnson, 2000). In my case, this tool helped me to connect between themes and identify patterns, which enhances the rigor.

Moreover, the reliability and validity of qualitative data can be enhanced using a variety of techniques (Long & Johnson, 2000; Rose & Johnson, 2020). This thesis followed the example set by Braun & Clarke (2022) to ensure rigour. Therefore, after the initial codes were generated, the codes were re-reviewed and developed using the Atlas software. Also, the codes were re-reviewed and rewritten after a period of time during the analysis to ensure credibility (Nassaji, 2020; Ghafouri & Ofoghi, 2016). Credibility is where the study provides the reader with evidence that the results accurately represent the study and have been recognised and evaluated in previous research (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999).

In addition, I created a number of tables in Word to visually see the bigger picture of the differences and similarities, which helped me gain a clearer understanding of the overall patterns in my data and the journey of my participants. As an example, please see figure 5 below:

(P) No& Position	Type of Uni	Environment Type	General Experience	Leadership Experience	Type of EXP	Discipline	SE Level	Performance
1 HD	GS	UN	8	0	S	English	High	Low
2 HD	GS	PR	10	2	S	Art	M	M
3 HD	GS	UN	17	5	M	English	High	High
4 Dean	GS	UN	23	12	M	Childhood	High	High
5 HD	MIX	RE- role model		3	S	English	High	High
6 HD	GS	UN	20	3	S	Medical	Low	Low
7 HD	GS	RE – role model	20	1.5	S	Medical Science	M	M
8 HD	MIX	RE	4	2.5	S	Math	High	High
9 HD	GS	UN	21	4	M	Education	High	High
10 Dean	MIX	PR	8	5	S	IT	High	M

Figure 5 Codes and Patterns

Figure 5 referred to one of the analysis stages where I worked to gain a comprehensive understanding of my data and participants. I organised a table that presented participants' experience numbers, fields of experience, disciplines, and workplace types (e.g., mixed or gender-segregated). Additionally, the table included a general analysis of their performance, categorising it as either high and influential or low with minimal impact. This stage was followed by the generation of initial codes, which will be presented below.

- **Generating initial codes:**

The process of identifying patterns of shared meaning across a dataset involves compiling clusters of codes that share a core idea or concept (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The themes were constructed by me as a researcher, based on data, research questions, and the theory's factor which is self-efficacy. Once identified, all coded data relevant to each candidate theme is collated for a meaningful answer to the research question, as per the example below:

Transcription	Codes identified by researcher	Research questions
Interview question: Did you have a specific perception of	The yellow highlighted transcript: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoidance 	Q- How do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs

<p>your position and current role in managing the department before you started, and has that perception changed? From which perspective, in your opinion?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describing others' experience, not herself • Generalizing the issue everywhere • Lack of confidence 	<p>influence their leadership self-efficacy?</p>
<p>P6 response: Expectations are usually high for anyone in an administrative position to implement change, but you often face the reality that it is difficult to achieve because of the existing work system. For example, sometimes personal goals can feel challenging to accomplish, or initial expectations might be higher than the reality. I think this is natural and happens to everyone. Additionally, the lack of a system that facilitates work can naturally impact evaluation processes. In general, I am not speaking specifically about myself, as my administrative experience is limited, and I cannot make definitive judgments.</p>	<p>The blue highlighted transcript:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unresponsive workplace • Lack of clarity • Lack of policy • Bureaucratic 	<p>Q- How do the environmental work types (responsiveness, unresponsiveness, and semi-responsiveness) influence Saudi academic women's leaders' leadership styles?</p>

Table 10: Example transcript and how it was coded by the researcher.

- **Developing and reviewing themes.**

In this stage, I evaluated the alignment of the initial themes with the data and assessed the feasibility of the analysis by revisiting the complete dataset. Additionally, I ensured that each theme represented significant patterns in the data, providing a coherent

narrative connected to the research question. I also remained aware that adjustments might occur during this phase, such as dividing or merging themes to maintain a strong grounding in the data.

Furthermore, as I followed a theory-driven approach that combined deductive and inductive methods, I focused on the relationships between themes, their connection to theory, and their alignment with existing literature and the broader research context. The following table displays the same piece of transcription in order to smoothly show the connection to the process; this table illustrates how themes developed and linked to theory factors:

Research question	Transcription	Code	Developing themes	Theory's factor
How do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?	<p>Interview question: Did you have a specific perception of your position and current role in managing the department?</p> <p>P6 response: Expectations are usually high for anyone in an administrative position to implement change, but you often face the reality that it is difficult to achieve because of the existing work system. For example, sometimes personal goals can feel challenging to accomplish, or initial expectations might be higher than the reality. I think this is natural and happens to everyone. Additionally, the lack of a system that facilitates work can naturally impact evaluation processes. In general, I am not speaking specifically about myself, as my administrative experience is limited, and I cannot make definitive judgments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidance • Describe others experience not herself • Generalizing the issue everywhere • Lack of confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hesitations • Uncertainty 	Self-beliefs

Table 11: Developed themes connected to the theory.

- Refining, defining and naming themes:

In this phase of my analysis, I refined each theme to ensure it was clearly defined and centered around a strong core concept or essence. I reflected on the narrative conveyed by each theme, directly asking according to Braun and Clarke's (2019) guidelines: "What story does this theme tell?" and "How does it contribute to my overall interpretation of the data?" To support this process, I wrote brief synopses for each theme and chose concise, descriptive names that captured their essence. Throughout, I remained flexible, allowing for further adjustments or development of themes as needed to maintain the coherence and integrity of the analysis.

However, researchers who apply (TA) should anticipate that the journey would be an adventure (Braun and Clarke, 2019). This is exactly what I faced in this stage where I realized that some themes need further interpretations and connection to the theory.

The following table 12, as an example, presents how table was before I realised that it needed further analysis and connected to the theory.

Research question	How do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?	
Theory's factor	Transcription	Developing themes
Self-beliefs	P6 response: Expectations are usually high for anyone in an administrative position to implement change, but you often face the reality that it is difficult to achieve because of the existing work system. For example, sometimes personal goals can feel challenging to accomplish, or initial expectations might be higher than the reality. I think this is natural and happens to everyone. Additionally, the lack of a system that facilitates work can naturally impact evaluation processes. In general, I am not speaking specifically about myself, as my administrative experience is limited, and I cannot make definitive judgments.	Uncertainty

Table 12: analysis needs further connection to the theory.

In table 12, P6 was uncertain about her role, her impact and her ability to change, and according to the theory I need to determine if this was a low level of leadership self-efficacy or high? Thus, I began mapping the sub-themes with the factors that construct the theory. The strategy was iterative, switching between developing themes and connecting with self-efficacy theory and literature (Valley & Stallones, 2018). It was not easy to connect all of the themes with the theory's factors. At one point, I had to step back from the themes, figure out the big picture of the data, and focus on gaining a comprehensive understanding of how each theme relates to the theory and research question. Subsequently, to evaluate her level, I need to see what other themes were connected to her performance. I returned to the transcription, reread it, and identified the indications of performances, decisions, self-expressions relating to the leadership self-efficacy, as shown below in table no 13:

Research question	How do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?			
Theory's factor	Themes	Transcription	Performance evidence	Level according to theory
Self-beliefs	Uncertainty	<p>Q: How do you perceive the work environment and its atmosphere?</p> <p>P: The work environment is not motivating. It lacks supportive activities, a clear vision, and defined goals. For instance, there are no annual plans or objectives in place. It feels more like just an academic setting focused</p>	<p>She underestimated her ability which resulted in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -an inability to develop and influence in her workplace. - blaming to the regression and failure to the plans in her work. 	Low

		solely on teaching and studying.		
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Table 13: Analysis connected to theory.

When I immerse myself in her story, I find that she has a low level of leadership self-efficacy, as indicated in table13. Braun and Clarke (2022) emphasise that researchers need to view the full journey and story of the participant and reflect on it to ensure a deep understanding of their experiences. This involves engaging with the data holistically, considering not only the themes that were identified but also the context that shapes the participants' narratives. In my study, I adopted this approach by reflecting on the participants' stories, which allowed me to capture the richness and complexity of their lived experiences.

- Writing the paper:

Finally, the writing stage, which is an important phase in the analytic process, begins early in TA. Formal analytic writing frequently begins in Phase 3, with informal writing serving as a foundation for formal writing. Writing up refines and completes the writing process, attempting to weave together analytic narrative with compelling data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The final writing up includes creating the introduction, method, and conclusion portions of a research report, as well as incorporating editing, presented in the discussion sections in the following chapters of this thesis: 6, 7, and 8.

5.11. Researcher role

As a researcher, I ensure **rigour** in the conduct of this thesis through promoting credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ghafouri & Ofoghi, 2016; Johnson *et al.*, 2020). The credibility has been introduced by Closa (2021) “how we know what we know and whether and how our insights apply more widely”. Credibility is established through the researcher's adherence to established procedures for theory testing and methodological application. This generates analyses which furnish the reader with evidence that the findings accurately represent the study and have been recognised and

evaluated in prior research (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999). In this study it is achieved by conducting interviews, collecting notes, and providing a thorough analysis of the data.

In the context of transferability, the researcher furnishes sufficient information that allows readers to ascertain the extent to which the results are pertinent to their own cases or to other situations (Johnson *et al.*, 2020). The application of social cognitive theory assists in the discovery of deeper meaning, and the analysis of participants' emotions, words, and meaning additionally ensure transferability. Furthermore in terms of dependability, the researcher gives a clear enough account of the study process to enable approximate replication of the work (Johnson *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, "auditability" has been proposed as a definition of dependability that pertains to qualitative research studies' consistency (Janis, 2022). The dependability is pursued by applying the pilot study and following the thematic code process. Finally, the results are based on a reflective consideration of information obtained from participants, rather than the researcher's opinions or prejudice (Johnson *et al.*, 2020). I conducted the interviews by asking my participants for any clarification to enrich the research, and in writing the analysis and discussion chapters, there were high editions and rewriting process to improve the patterns and codes to reach a deeper meaning.

5.12. Reflexivity

This is defined where a philosopher uses a reflective approach to research with first taking stock of their own values and assumptions, then consider how they are shaped by their social context, the people they've interacted with, and the subject matter at hand (Shufutinsky, 2020). Moreover, **reflexivity** is part of my role as researcher to enhance rigour in this study (Rettke et al., 2018) and it has been clarified throughout the study. Nevertheless, with regard to the methodology section, this research was carried out within the interpretivist paradigm, employing psychological behavioral theory (self-efficacy theory) to shape the theoretical framework applied to enhance the methodology. Additionally, I believe that studying Saudi women's leadership self-efficacy by applying a qualitative method will enhance understanding of their own perceptions. This methodology enabled me to investigate a pattern of leadership behaviour via the perspectives of the participants. I still believe this was the optimal methodology, but it was

not the only alternative because there are researchers who implement quantitative and mixed methods to explore participants' self-efficacy and behaviours (Hylton, 2021; Ali *et al.*, 2018; Hannah *et al.*, 2012). Although they agreed with emphasising self-efficacy as a theory, the data analysis was done on a quantitative scale and methods. Furthermore, as a methodological reflection, I realised both the advantageous features and weaknesses of the choice I made, and I believed applying a qualitative methodology for self-efficacy theory is required to obtain in-depth data and interpretations (Hylton, 2021). In addition, adapting this approach required me to continuously evaluate the alignment of my paradigm and theoretical framework in data generation and analysis.

5.13. Positionality insider/outsider

Researcher positionality is shaped by their cultural background, gender, occupation, and level of education (Bukamal, 2022). I am aware as researcher of my positionality where I aim to explore and understand women's behaviour in leadership due to previous work experience. However, I have also worked in a private banking sector environment, but my thesis has been applied to as different field which is governmental higher education which can be considered as outsider positionality. Further, the similarities and differences at the same time support me to avoid subjectivity and biasness in understanding women in academic leadership positions. On the other hand, I have an insider positionality where I am a Saudi woman who belongs and is living in Saudi culture, and I can understand deeply what women may face in their workplace. In addition, I understand the current change that requires women to have confidence in front of the high stereotype that they have face which previously gave them limited leadership authorities and positions.

However, being in an insider and outsider position at the same time has a positive side for me as a researcher. By being an insider that enhances my ability to have rich analyses and a deeper understanding of my participants emotions. But at the same time, an outsider position enhances me to see the differences on their statements, reaction, expressions and their perceptions to work tasks. Additionally, my positionality as outsider and insider guided me to adapt self-efficacy theory, which can provide me with in-depth interpretations to exactly what I may knew as Saudi women and what I may not know as

an outsider of the participants' work field.

Furthermore, I have worked outside the academia, which has been known as a comfortable work environment compared to the bank, so I was curious about their workplace, and I had no expectations that the organisation as a factor may showed high differences among the participants' perspectives. I can understand that pressure is not necessarily related to the lack of flexibility as in the bank, but it can relate to bureaucracy of higher education institutions.

As a Saudi woman, I can see how genderism has been enhanced by the Saudi culture. This influences women's self-perceptions which raised the question inside me how Saudi men perceive Saudi women may behave - are they going to support them or are they going to act as soldiers to the paternal culture? How is genderism after Vision 2030 goals comparing it to before - is it less, or will it take a different shape in minimising the women's confidence. However, the results of my thesis aim to discover why women deserve empowerment by understanding their own experience and how they have behaved (growth or limitation) in their roles.

In addition, as a Saudi woman who has lived in a gender segregated society, I was not aware about the stereotype among women themselves, but as this research focuses on women only as a sample this allows me to understand this concept deeply and improve my own self-awareness.

5.14. Ethical consideration

My purpose as a researcher was to investigate academic leaders' leadership styles, levels of self-efficacy, their institution's influence, and the sources that enhance their leadership self-efficacy. Ethical considerations are essential and fundamental to research protocols (Moriña, 2021). Research ethics is an umbrella term for a web of norms and policies that shape and control the field of research (Madhushani, 2016). Furthermore, Char *et al.*, (2020) assert that researchers should give serious consideration to ethical considerations at every stage of the research process. To preserve the honesty and reliability of the

research results and to safeguard the rights, dignity, and welfare of the participants, it is essential to adhere to these ethical norms (Bell & Bryman, 2007). In addition, ethics protect the researcher and organisations from any legal consequences. An example to ethical stages, dealing with people, obtaining entry to institutions, collecting, and interpreting data. Consequently, to conduct this thesis I applied for ethics according to the Lancaster University ethical considerations. It has been noted that educational research done outside of the UK, by UK scholars must meet certain ethical standards as with all research conducted in the UK (BERA, 2024). The researcher obtained access to study participants by formal approval signed by them, please see the appendix 2. Additionally, participants were informed to feel free to withdraw at any time without any justifications. Moreover, participants' anonymity and confidentiality are one of the ethical procedures in this research as below:

5.15. Confidentiality and protection of participants

Their information was kept confidential, and the participants are protected from exposure to risks such as losing their jobs, being harassed by their colleagues', reputational harm, and legal consequences (Bell & Bryman, 2007). Moreover, participants' feelings and words contribute to research procedures and humanitarian research, and their names and any evidence revealing their identity have been isolated (Char *et al.*, 2020). Participants' personal details or identities were not obtained during each phase of the study (Madhushani, 2016). Furthermore, the identities of the heads of departments and deans of Saudi universities were not revealed and kept secure and safe. To protect the details, each university's name was coded with a structure type such as gender-segregated A, gender-segregated B, women only, and mixed. The coding of each university name ensures that no one other than the researcher has access to the data. Furthermore, the researcher has replaced the participant names with numbers. The processing of data pertaining to participants in a manner that is both secret and anonymous is considered to be the standard for the conduct of research, as stated in the ethical approval and confirmed in the procedures of this research. Unless participants voluntarily waive this right, my role as a researcher is to accept the participants' right to privacy and grant them their rights to complete confidentiality (BERA, 2024). Hence, until

this degree is successfully completed, all data codification will be securely stored in a locked facility. For more information, please check the appendix.

Ethics during the interviews: I am aware as a researcher about the ethical process during the interviews to protect the feelings of my participants and the importance of building a good rapport to avoid any harm, misunderstanding or discomfort making them unable to express their feelings (Bell & Bryman, 2007; Lancaster, 2017; Moriña, 2021). In addition, I avoid asking them personal questions that may make them feel worried toward conducting the interviews (Bell & Bryman, 2007). I avoided the longest interview, all of the interview's times took around 40 to maximum 70 minutes as expected and according to the time they needed to share their own experience (Lancaster, 2017). I told them that they are volunteers which each second is very valuable to me and to the research area. Furthermore, power relations have been discussed in different studies that may affect the ethical considerations in terms of sensitivity and ambiguity of information and participants (Lancaster, 2017). The power dynamic refers to the structural disparity and unequal standing that exists between the researcher and the sample (Lancaster, 2017; Bell & Bryman, 2007). In my thesis my participants have more power than me, their academic positions as deans and heads of departments whereas I am a PhD student. This power may show in their knowledge and desire to guide the questions. An example from my interviews, one of the participants was asking me after each question I asked, "what type of information do you exactly want?" the questions were about her experience but in some way, she was trying control the nature of the research question. However, my role to make her feel comfortable where I said which angle from your views and experience prefer, surely that will add value to the findings. At the end, allowing my participants to express themselves comfortably and being aware of the influence of unequal relationships is the key to keeping the process ethical.

5.16. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have framed my research within an overall framework of knowledge and presented a comprehensive outline of my research paradigm, design, methodology, participants, data source, and method. Furthermore, the data collection processes, pilot study, data analysis, and ethical considerations are covered.

In summary, this study seeks to investigate the self-efficacy of academic women leaders in Saudi Arabia in leadership roles through an examination of their beliefs and behavioural leadership style. I am aligned with the interpretivism paradigm for this thesis on the basis of my idealism regarding ontology and subjective epistemology. The methodology approach is qualitative, where it employed the cognitive social theory (self-efficacy) to have a deep comprehension of the behaviour in leadership of the academic women who are represented in this study. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were the method used to reach the final findings of this thesis. The samples were collected from four different public Saudi universities. There has been a theory-driven approach to the data analysis. In addition, this chapter detailed the implementation and ethical considerations in order to substantiate the rigour of this thesis.

Chapter 6: Sources of leadership self-efficacy

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Saudi women's leadership self-efficacy has been influenced through their academic leadership positions. This study covered four governmental universities in Riyadh. The research question that guided the study was: What shapes the self-efficacy and leadership styles of Saudi women leaders in higher education? From this question, this study will question:

1. To what extent are sources of leadership self-efficacy (experiences, training, Influence of emotions, verbal effect) available to Saudi academic women leaders in their workplace, from their own perspectives?
2. How do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?
3. How do the environmental work types (responsiveness, unresponsiveness, and semi-responsiveness) influence Saudi academic women's leaders' leadership styles?

6. Introduction

To understand the leadership self-efficacy of Saudi women in academic management positions, this study employed self-efficacy theory. Leadership Self-efficacy is the ability of a leader to make high efforts to achieve goals, motivate the team, and solve problems (Bandura, 2001; Shirey, 2020; Moran & Israel, 2021). Leaders' self-efficacy can be high or low due to several sources that enhance and increase the level of leadership self-efficacy. The four sources for one's self-efficacy that will be discussed in this chapter are experiences, training, emotional influence, and verbal effects, as explained in the methodology - one of the main analytical categories, due to the importance placed on it in the theoretical framework (Bandura, 1999; Hendricks, 2016; Usher *et al.*, 2015; Ruggs *et al.*, 2023). This question has been motivated by the findings of several Saudi studies that highlighted the challenges that face Saudi women in accessing leadership positions and acquiring leadership competencies (Al-Qahtani *et al.*, 2021; Sanchez and Lehnert, 2019; Al-Rashdi & Abdelwahed, 2022; Akbar *et al.*, 2023). It is important to understand women's views on the potential and availability of resources that contribute to promoting

self-efficacy and leadership. This is particularly poignant in this current change of Vision 2030, where women have been recently promoted to higher positions in leadership.

This study included eighteen participants. The sample contains academic leaders (Deans and Heads of Departments) from four universities in Riyadh. Each source of leadership self-efficacy will be carefully presented based on its own findings and discussion. This is due to the fact that this is a qualitative study that conducts an in-depth investigation of the data, which may facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the sources when they are discussed and presented separately. The table 14 below displays the outlines of the findings and discussion presentation for this chapter.

Main theme: Experience
Findings: Sub-themes
Discussion
Main theme: Training and role-model
Findings: Sub-themes
Discussion
Main theme: Emotional influence
Findings: Sub-themes
Discussion
Main theme: Verbal influence
Findings: Sub-themes
Discussion

Table 14: Presentation of the findings and discussion of sources of leadership self-efficacy.

6.1. Findings

6.2. Experience

Experience is considered one of the most valuable sources for women's accessibility in leadership roles (Jackson, 2020; Sanchez & Lehnert, 2019). On the other hand, it has been confirmed that a lack of experience generates challenges such as a decrease in

women's self-confidence to lead (Bauer, 2020; Fisk & Overton, 2019). Therefore, one of the main goals of this study is to understand to what extent the availability of experience has been available, and to what extent it has been influential. The findings of this present research found that levels of women's experience fall into four categories: no prior experience, single experience, prior multi-experience, and new positions of authority.

- **No and low prior experience:**

This theme represents a lack of experience in leadership for the group. Lack of experience is considered one of the fundamental barriers that women face, which enhances their leadership empowerment and leadership performance (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Akbar *et al.*, 2023; Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). There were five participants out of eighteen who have no prior experience, and very little in their current role. For the majority of participants in this group, this was considered their first opportunity to take the role of Head of Department. Even though some of them have over twenty years of academic experience, they never considered being nominated for leadership positions. For example, P6 finds herself uninterested in leadership roles and has just accepted the role of Head of Department to support her colleagues who were disinterested in the role through their previous experience. This is an indication of a lack of desire for leadership roles in this particular college - interpreted as a potentially unresponsive environment - and will be discussed in the eighth chapter.

Furthermore, P7 said,

This is my first time to run the role; my colleagues encouraged me.

However, she had done some leadership tasks, such as joining committees to fill managerial roles.

On the other hand, P16 was a fresh graduate from doctoral degree and had never been to any departmental meetings, she said.

I just finished my PhD; I have not even yet gotten the promotion after having my PhD. I was surprised that I was offered this position. I find it an opportunity to foster my promotion.

All of the above participants have one thing in common: a lack of experience in leadership and a lack of interest in management. This has a negative impact, which creates difficulties for them, and they agreed that their role is hard to do. On the other hand, P8 and P5 have no prior experience, but they have the willingness and ability to manage and change. Their lack of experience did not play negatively in their situation, and the reason for that is that P5 has a second source of leadership self-efficacy, that of the role model, which will be presented later on in this chapter. On the other hand, with P8, the organisational atmosphere supports her as it is distinguished by good collaborative teamwork. Organisational factors will be discussed later in the final chapter of analysis and discussion.

To sum up, lack of experience impacts three of the participants' leadership self-efficacy; whereas two participants have alternative supports such as teamwork, a motivated environment, and a role model. Depending on their level of experience, women's self-efficacy in leadership can vary (Selzer and Robles, 2019). However, the upcoming results will delve deeper into the findings associated with a higher level of experience.

- **Single Experience:**

A single experience is identified in this thesis by a respondent having leadership experience before taking on their current role. However, this experience is in the same department or the same college, not in a different environment or different sector. Six out of eighteen participants have single experience in leadership roles: the range of time spanning from four years to 23 years. It was found that this source was available in the category due to different reasons: their aspirations and their desire to continue to work in this role. Furthermore, P12 confirmed that her experience supported her in acquiring more leadership positions.:

I worked as the head of department for years, and now I am a dean. I considered the head department role as the kitchen that prepared me well to be a dean.

However, P17, who has more than ten years' experience in leadership, referred to the type of role more than the length. She said:

I have worked in various management roles since 2009 until now. I was a coordinator for scientific research and then the vice dean of scientific research and postgrad studies for four years, and then I became responsible for student activities at the university level, vice dean for educational affairs, and now head of department. But the head of the department is very different, and it is the most stressful role compared to previous administrative roles.

This means that sometimes the type of role is more important than having long years of experience. If the leadership role deals with fewer goals and less pressure, it may not be enough to prepare the individual to manage a high-pressure position. Moreover, P10, who has a single experience, confirmed that she faced challenges in managing her role because of the type of leadership experience, which is similar to that of P17, which does not support her current role as a dean. Therefore, this study will discover how prior and multiple experiences play a role in the sample.

- **Prior multi experience:**

It is significant for this study to explore how prior and multiple roles in different sectors on the other side worked as sources of the participants' leadership self-efficacy. The findings found that four participants in this thesis had worked in different sectors, such as universities and public schools, two different universities, the private sector, and a governmental university. Their experience started when they had four to twelve years' experience. The reason for this group to have acquired this in-depth and rich experience, is that they have moved from one sector to another, looking for better opportunities, and to expand their connections. For example, P4 worked in multiple different sectors besides her current role at the university as a dean. She worked in charities, at the international institution as a consultant, and as head chair for one of the governmental Saudi institutions that focus on society. Her length of experience is 23 years. In addition, she commented on the experience she has, saying:

I believe part of my role is to add a contribution, so whenever, I find an opportunity that I go for it.

This rich experience has a positive reflection on her management decisions, goals, and developments. P4 was able, as a dean, to make impressive developments:

We were able as a team to reduce the response waiting for any emails of unknown time and the unlimited impact on the workflow to be within 48 hours. In addition, I was able to re-evaluate all the management teams to increase effectiveness in college. I have encouraged the mutual benefit of the departments of the college to benefit from the outputs of students and support the gifted.

Further, P14, who worked in public education in different positions such as a school's manager and a school's head supervisor, has now moved to the University as a head of department. She justified her transfer by:

I was looking for a better opportunity, and as you know, higher education has a reputation as an industry. But to be honest, I've found that public schools have more clarity regarding politics and change. This environment is not like what I expect, but I think it is only a matter of time to adapt.

Furthermore, participants who run new roles with complete authority are included in the findings, which will be presented in the next section, since this thesis collected its data after Vision 2030 was announced.

- **New authorities' positions:**

There was a limitation on women's access to leadership positions due to gendered segregated buildings according to cultural and religious rules (Abalkhail, 2017; Akbar *et al.*, 2023). However, as mentioned in the literature review, this has potentially changed due to the transformation plan Vision 2030 (Akbar *et al.*, 2023; Hodges, 2017). In this study, three participants were empowered to assume leadership positions that were previously limited to men in academia. The positions are those of Dean and Head of Department over both sections (men and women) that allow them to have full authority. All the participants who have been empowered for this position have prior leadership experience, from three to 23 years. P15 said that:

The workplace culture was dominated by masculinity, especially among the upper leadership and decision-makers; however, Vision 2030 changed this culture smoothly. Therefore, I was so excited to be the first woman to manage both sections of my department.

Further, P18 expressed her rich experience in different positions at the University, saying:

Every position I have been in was due to my reputation, which I gained from my efforts over positions I managed.

Also, she commented on her new role:

It is similar to the previous roles that I have worked in before.

The experience she has contributed to makes her feel confident and satisfied with her performance. Although she is being empowered for first time in positions, she was completely prepared for it, and this confirmed what the literature review suggested, that Saudi women have high qualifications and high competencies (Abdullah Dahlan, 2023; Saleh & Malibari, 2021).

To understand and explain more the findings, the following paragraphs will present the discussion that focus on the first source, that of experience.

6.3. Discussion

This section discusses and explores the first source of leadership self-efficacy, which is experience. Experience as a factor has been presented in self-efficacy theory under the title Mastery Experience, where individuals have gained through work experience, knowledge, and scenarios that recorded their successes, achievements, and failures (Murphy, 2016; Hendricks, 2016; Bandura, 1999). Because it is considered one of the most reliable sources for self-efficacy, this study finds that experience can be classified according to the findings into four types: no\low prior experience, single experience, prior and multiple experiences, and new authorities' positions.

There are eighteen participants in this study, and their experience was distinguished because of its duration and then its impact on their performance or beliefs. In addition, this study is qualitative; therefore, the findings cannot be generalised, even though experience is considered one of the significant sources that build one's self-efficacy (Nassaji, 2020; Bandura, 1997). The findings found that participants who have no\low prior experience can be negatively influenced, but at the same time, not all of them. For example, three of the participants found their role hard to do and did not meet their expectations. So, being without experience influenced them negatively in performing the role. Lack of interest in management roles was one of the reasons for their lack of

experience, which affected their leadership self-efficacy. This can be explained because of the personal, organisational, or social barriers mentioned by Al-Ahmadi (2011), Alghofaily (2019), and Alsharif (2018). Personal barriers can be self-confidence, fears, and childhood upbringing that women are raised upon in Saudi society, where leadership in most life affairs is the responsibility of men, and not women. The organisational barriers are partly represented by a lack of leadership training, and this will be discussed in the second section. The last possible barrier to having a leadership experience is a social barrier, where women prefer to avoid jobs with high pressure, so they can maintain a healthy work-life balance (Abalkhail, 2017; Alotaibi, 2020).

On the other hand, the lack of experience for the other two participants was a result of being new, as their experience spans just two to three years. Nevertheless, they were able to fulfil their roles due to personal and environmental support. The personal factors suggest that they have higher leadership self-efficacy, such as aspiration and confidence, will be introduced in the second chapter (Beliefs). Additionally, it is important to note that the high collaborative team, role models, and clear policy represent the environmental factors that will be examined in the eighth findings chapter.

Furthermore, for the second category who have prior experience, the findings emphasised that experience is not always a supportive milestone in their career. In particular, one of the participants, who has more than ten years' experience in leadership, confirmed that the role of Head of Department is different and more challenging compared to other management roles. In her case, the type of experience is more important than the duration. In addition, it has been confirmed by another respondent who considered the role of Head of Department, which she described as the 'kitchen', well-prepared her to manage her role as a Dean. Therefore, in this group of people who have management experience, the importance of the experience's type has been raised compared to its length. Some scholars, such as Al-Qahtani *et al.* (2021) confirmed that the number of years' experience is positively associated with Saudi women's access to leadership positions and empowerment opportunities. However, there might be untransferable soft skills from one position to another, according to Cortellazzo *et al.* (2019) and Qizi (2020). Moreover, findings from a study conducted by Alward and Phelps (2019) found that

leaders face difficulties in transferring leadership skills from the in-person workplace to the virtual one.

On the other hand, individuals who have prior experience in more than one field or sector showed a higher level of understanding of the challenges they faced. They were more prepared in terms of their expectations for the issues and difficulties they had to deal with. Because of that, they distinguished themselves by having the ability to make developments. According to Hoyt (2013), a leader's capacity to prepare, negotiate, and be open to discussing issues before accepting the role indicates a high level of self-efficacy (Eibl *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, the ability to broaden knowledge and understanding for two different systems, such as public schools and universities, and identify the weaknesses and strengths in each system led to enhancing their capacities. According to Bandura (1999), experience as a source broadens an individual's knowledge, which enhances her performance. However, there are some challenges in working in two different sectors, one of which is being unfamiliar with the new institution's policy. This has been introduced by Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023) as one of the challenges for women who are working in two different industries, such as coming from the international workplace to work in local organisations or the opposite. Additionally, this shift from one work culture to another can have an impact on employees by causing issues such as a lack of peer support, stimulation, and difficulty adapting (Shaffer *et al.*, 2012).

Furthermore, DeRue and Wellman's (2009) research on the relationship between leadership skills and type of work experience revealed that high-pressure jobs do not necessarily contribute to one's development, but they can negatively affect an individual, leading to anxiety. Nevertheless, in-depth and various experiences are confirmed to strengthen one's self-efficacy to develop and overcome challenges.

Moreover, high self-efficacy is associated with high confidence, which enables leaders to feel confident in their performance and ability to manage their responsibilities (Johnson, 2017). This study focuses on the Saudi context, especially in the period of the Vision 2030 changes. According to several Saudi scholars, Saudi women in Higher Education suffer from a lack of experience in leadership roles (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Abalkhail, 2017; Akbar *et*

al., 2023). Therefore, it is significant to understand how experience supports Saudi women in the new leadership roles in which they have been empowered. The findings found that three participants have been empowered for the first time to manage both sections (women and men). However, all of them have prior years' experience, but this is just in the women's section. All of them expressed their enthusiasm for accepting or even nominating themselves for this position. They found that the new role extended to their former experience. Experience is a considerable source that enhances their performance in addition to their beliefs about their abilities. According to Bandura (2001), one's beliefs are the most significant factor in building self-efficacy. However, their beliefs as a factor will be discussed in the second chapter.

The experience as a source showed in this thesis is more than about the length of time of experience; it is having a profound and tangible influence on the performance of Saudi women. The absence of experience is not necessarily because of gender-segregated buildings, as the majority of the literature suggests (Tameem, 2019; Bakr, 2022; Hodges, 2017), but because of a lack of self-motivation, demotivated environments, and a lack of career paths. As some participants faced challenges because of a lack of experience, others still faced them, but not because of a lack of experience but rather because of their unfamiliarity with role types. On the other hand, other participants who enjoy managing their roles were supported with experience that has supportive and successful records that keep motivating them to acquire leadership roles.

Furthermore, several studies from international areas discussed the significance of experience for women in leadership (Smirles *et al.*, 2020; Rhode, 2017; Nachatar Singh, 2022; Lyness & Grotto, 2018; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021; Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi, 2023; Campuzano, 2019). The studies above focused on the role of women's experience in leadership to overcome stereotypes and challenges and enhance their productivity. Furthermore, they stated that women with leadership experience are frequently given less demanding assignments in comparison to men, resulting in a limited presence of women in leadership roles. This gap is due to stereotypes about women, such as the assumption that they require protection and are incapable of agency-like duties. Sexism can have a detrimental impact on women's self-perception, resulting in decreased performance on

difficult activities. This also enhances the significance of experience-type results compared to length in this study. Furthermore, in the Saudi context, the studies covered two parts: before and after Vision 2030. Previously, the Vision argued the limitations for women's opportunities in leadership positions due to organisational, religious, and personal barriers (Abalkhail, 2017; Alghofaily, 2019; Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Alsubaihi, 2016; Kattan, 2015). After Vision 2030, research focused more on the empowerment and importance of the experience, which aligns with the findings of this study that relates to new role authorities (Hodges, 2017; Al-Qahtani *et al.*, 2021; Alsubhi *et al.*, 2020; Alharbi, 2022).

6.4. Training and role model

The second factor in self-efficacy theory is vicarious experience, which means that watching colleagues perform well might encourage individuals to achieve their duties with confidence (Hendricks, 2016). However, it has been interpreted in this study through training and role models. Lack of training is, according to various Saudi studies, one of the challenges that women face in academic environments (Al-Qahtani *et al.*, 2021; Abalkhail, 2017). Additionally, the importance of the role model is a theme which has been extracted from participants' responses and one which affects their decision to be in academic management positions, thus supporting their performance.

According to the findings, training opportunities can be split into three levels: Low, Intermediate, High, and the role model theme. To clarify, low training is characterised by no training or poor-quality training at work. Also, at the intermediate level, they regard this as fair or available but not as practical experience. Meanwhile, the "high and rich" level refers to the training with high criteria, and respondents were satisfied with its level. On the other hand, the issue of role models reflected participants who were influenced by peers' example in their workplace. The results suggest that not all levels of training can be considered as a source of leadership self-efficacy. The below table 15 shows that although there are three levels of training: low, intermediate, and high, fourteen participants out of eighteen described training with no impact:

Level of training	Number of individuals (18)	The Impact
Low	5	Zero effect
Intermediate	3	No effect
High	10	4 out 10 has an effective role, while 6 no effect

Table 15: Training levels and impact.

The data in Table 15 above indicates that the majority of the participants did not perceive that training courses had any influence on their leadership self-efficacy. Five participants reported that the university offers a limited selection of courses, resulting in a low level of training. Conversely, three participants reported that their universities offer an adequate number of courses. Participants at both low and intermediate training levels determined that the offered courses had no noticeable effect on their experiences. The final group of 10 participants reported that their workplace provides a diverse array of courses; however, only four of them found them to be beneficial.

- **Low training level:**

Five of the participants found that training is not offered by their organisations. In particular, P11 mentioned that the level of training is very poor, saying that:

There are significant flaws in the training side, and I never considered attending any university training because of their poor quality; it was not an investment; it was a waste of time.

Whereas P18 faced the same issue but she said that

I improved myself by joining various trainings relying on my personal budget, proximately 95% of course was from my personal efforts while 5% only was free from the university.

She confirmed that she opted for training as she has a leadership diploma and various courses in quality, and these have helped her to progress.

- **Intermediate training level:**

Only three of the participants have an intermediate level of training; however, its impact is similar to the low level. This has been considered intermediate according to the participants' responses, but the level of workload was hindering their ability to benefit from the training. P16 commented on that:

The training opportunities are fair, but I could not attend them due to the workload.

In her case, even though there is training offered, the high workload was an obstacle to joining in. Additionally, P20 said that:

Whatever there is training, it cannot be compared to experiences on the ground; training is still theoretical material, but experience is the real source that refines my skills.

- **High training level:**

Ten of the interviewees confirmed that they have strong and rich training in their environment. Nevertheless, in terms of its impact, this differed. Only four out of ten said it had a positive influence on their preparation and performance. P13 stated that:

The university provided a diverse range of training opportunities, and the training covered a variety of areas, including leadership and teaching. It has really helped me to understand my role as head of department and meet other heads of department.

In addition, P9 emphasised the benefits of training for her role. She said that:

As you know, my department is concerned about the quality process, and to conduct all of this, I would not be able to do it without the intensive courses from the university. To be honest, they really pay a high cost to offer a high and very qualified learning session for me and my team.

On the other hand, the other six participants expressed that the training opportunity is rich, but they confirmed that the experience has a considerable role in managing their current role. P12 said that:

Of course, the university has a role in offering training; I always receive emails for the latest opportunity, but I believe that my experience prepares me well for my role.

Although, six participants agreed that training as source of knowledge is provided by their university, they were unwilling to attend and there were different interpretations: such as having sufficient supportive professional experience, or not having time, and work pressure.

To summarise, training as an opportunity did not have a considerable role in forming and enhancing leadership self-efficacy. Additionally, this aligns with some of the information presented in the literature reviews about the lack of, and poor quality of training (Abalkhail, 2019; Alotaibi, 2020).

Role-Models:

The role model is a theme identified by researcher according to three participants' responses in this study, and it is considered one of the sources of self-efficacy. The function of the role model in leadership is crucial, because it increases individuals' aspirations to obtain leadership roles. Additionally, it enhances building self-efficacy as it is part of observing other successes (Jackson, 2020; Bandura, 2001). P7 confirmed:

There are no training opportunities at all related to the position, and I started learning my duties by looking at my previous colleagues and following their guidance.

She acknowledged that, despite the heavy tasks surprising her, it was not enough for her.

In addition, P5 confirmed the importance of role-mode support:

I do not feel shy about asking the former head of department to guide me or support me with some advice. There are really new matters that I have no idea about, and I found her supporting me.

Moreover, her environment was rich with women's images who have been empowered in high positions, such as the University's rector. She commented that:

I am very proud that our university is run by the first Saudi women, and I believe we are an example of a healthy environment for empowering women.

In summary, role models served as an alternative and supportive solution for participants, replacing training methods. However, there are different types of role models, which can make their influence vary (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014).

6.5. Discussion

The second source of leadership self-efficacy in this research is training and role models. This source is considered effective by a number of studies which have been conducted by Nørgaard *et al.*, 2012; and Abou Hashish and Bajbeir, 2022. Such scholars examined their participants' self-efficacy before and after the training, and the results approved the effectiveness of this source. Furthermore, according to the theory employed in this study, self-efficacy refers to an individual's strong belief in their ability to perform, solve, create, and motivate. Training and knowledge can improve leaders' beliefs and performance in managing their teams, setting goals, pursuing their plans, and so on (Bandura, 2001; Lartey *et al.*, 2023).

The training levels have been classified according to participants responses to low, medium, and high. Most of the participants' responses confirmed that training is offered by their universities. However, regardless of the levels, some participants confirmed that work in the real field is more effective than training. Five participants expressed their disappointment in the absence of this source. Nevertheless, one respondent has made the decision to develop herself and pursue courses in leadership outside of her workplace, depending on her personal budget. On the other side of the medium level, only three participants emphasised that opportunities are fair and good. However, it has no role in building their beliefs or leadership capacities due to the work pressure that prevent them to benefit from this source. Further, six participants perceived this to be a rich opportunity although it still has no impact on their role. That is because of their high workload and their current level of satisfaction. Only four participants in this study believed that training contributed to their leadership growth and understanding of their role. Additionally, however, the training courses have contributed to building relationships with their colleagues at the same level of leadership to exchange knowledge and benefit from experiences.

Training serves as a highly valuable resource for leaders' development, knowledge acquisition, and network establishment. However, in order to optimise this benefit, Universities should allocate time for Department Directors and Deans to participate, enhance the quality of training, and tailor it to the needs of participants.

Furthermore, the result has shown that the provision of strong role models is one of the sources of self-efficacy, and these function as motivational and inspirational images (Jackson, 2020; Hoyt, 2013). According to Durbin & Tomlinson (2014), there are different types of role models in the workplace, such as close/distant and up/across/down. Further, they explained that a "close role model" is someone who engages personally with individuals and offers their advice and experience on work tasks and problem solutions. On the other hand, the "distant role model" is one who is not as available as the former one and is observed by someone from a distance. Additionally, the "up role model" means the model who works in higher positions in the organisation's hierarchy, but the "across-down role model" model works at the same employee level and is regarded as a colleague. According to P7, it motivates her to aspire for this role as Head of Department; however, her observation of her former co-workers does not help her in her practical work life. Because of the high workload and being unprepared to deal with it, in her situation, this type of role model is a distant one, which can explain why it has no impact on managing her position, although it motivates her to pursue it. According to research by Hoyt (2013), women with high levels of self-efficacy are most influenced by successful role models, whereas those with low levels of self-efficacy are less motivated, which has a negative impact on their ability to lead. In the P7 case, the role model influenced and affected her self-efficacy positively. Nevertheless, she mentioned that she faced unexpected tasks, but she managed them, and that's what distinguishes one's high self-efficacy.

On the other hand, the P5 environment is rich with positive and empowered role models in high and well-empowered positions. The role models have a positive and effective impact compared to P7 because their roles are presented by being close, distant, and up type. They provided her with trust and encouraged her to see herself in different roles. The presence of role models in the work environment supports building a leadership

identity for women (Campuzano, 2019). It develops women's leadership comprehension and professional ambitions (American Association of University Women, 2016). Furthermore, P5 said she was more comfortable and had exact expectations about the workload and duties. Additionally, she has open communication with her former colleagues to support her and discuss any new situations with them. It has been approved that role models have a significant impact on individuals by demonstrating that success is attainable and also demonstrating how to achieve goals. Furthermore, the role model influences progress and contributes to enhancing individual self-efficacy (Hoyt 2013).

The close role models in this study have a positive impact, while the distant one has a very minor impact in terms of motivations, and this does not prepare participants for dealing with difficulties. It has been emphasised by several scholars that the absence of women's role models in leadership roles causes challenges for women (Latu *et al.*, 2019; Topić, 2023; Paule & Yelin, 2022; Campuzano, 2019). Additionally, they confirmed this issue started in childhood, where girls have been raised in different ways compared to boys, which affects their desire for social representation. Nevertheless, the provision of women's role models enhances women's ability to know how to act, stand, and move towards challenges. In addition, they have been found to increase women's productivity and job satisfaction. Furthermore, it has been highlighted that a lack of role models in women's leadership roles makes women face difficulties in how to adopt assertive traits, which are considered masculine, and when they do not use them, they face stereotypes and judgments. Role models in leadership roles enhance women's leadership self-efficacy and ability to make decisions.

Moreover, numerous studies around the world support the value of training and role models in developing self-efficacy (Abou Hashish & Bajbeir, 2022; Lartey *et al.*, 2023; Majid & Setyaningrum, 2022; Latu *et al.*, 2019). Training enhances women's self-efficacy and self-confidence in leading their teams. It was highly recommended that effective and intensive training support women to overcome any difficulties. Furthermore, several Saudi scholars emphasised the significance of training for leadership development (Alotaibi, 2020; Al-Qahtani *et al.*, 2021). However, the lack of training has been the subject of a huge debate in most studies because it has increased the challenges for Saudi women

in their leadership career growth (Alfaraidy, 2021; Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Akbar *et al.*, 2023; Alharbi, 2022). Moreover, according to the results of this study, training did not exist as a sufficient resource to build their leadership competencies or expand their understanding of performing their academic leadership roles. This is due to the absence of courses related to their roles and the poor quality of the training.

Furthermore, the results of another study by Al Maki (2017) added a recommendation related to women's management practice in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia, which is the importance of increasing high-quality courses to develop leadership performance. Therefore, this study recommends conducting further studies to understand the type of training and its' relation to their role. In addition, it is advisable to explore the reasons for the reluctance of academic leaders to attend the courses offered by their institutions (Mayya *et al.*, 2021).

6.6. Emotional effects

Emotional impact is shown by the person's sentiments while performing her tasks, which include stress, tiredness, and poor work-life balance (Usher *et al.*, 2015; Bandura, 1988). According to the findings, the participants' feelings in this study are different and hence classified into two groups: both positive and negative. The following section will show each linked theme.

- **The positive feelings:**

Nine of the participants are content with their daily tasks, co-workers, University policies, and jobs. There are two themes that represent their feelings: first, being grateful, and second, feeling comfortable.

- **Gratitude at work**

Hu and Kaplan (2015) stressed in their study that gratitude is an important feeling in the work environment, helps to grow relationships, and also has a positive impact on increasing performance and creating positive attitudes in team spirit. Being grateful for their role and the institutions they work in has been expressed in multiple ways. Grateful for P5 is shown by the smile that is drawn in her face every time the name of her university

is mentioned by people. She expressed her feelings about her workplace in a smooth and pleasant tone, saying:

I always smile when I hear the name of the institution.

As a result of that feeling, loyalty and belonging to her work environment have increased, as she feels that this helps her to make differences and achievements in her workplace.

Furthermore, having gratitude – for P8 – has contributed to increased thankfulness and motivational manners. She said:

All I heard were thankful words, and I am aware how important this is to motivate the academic staff. Therefore, I am very keen to issue certificates of thanks and appreciation to my team and request financial incentives according to what is available in the university system for them.

Moreover, gratitude was shown by P18, as was trust shown by her team and colleagues in her skills and abilities. She commented:

I feel appreciation, affection, and complete satisfaction towards my female colleagues.

Additionally, she confirmed that she always has these feelings surrounding her in the workplace: "trust and respect" from everyone towards her skills and experience. She confirmed that any new mission, initiative, or suggestion always had her name listed as the first one nominated by her colleagues. Gratitude as feelings contributed to enhancing their leadership self-efficacy. It motivated them to achieve more, create a positive vibe and appreciate their teams.

- **Comfort**

The second theme representing the feelings they had in their workplace is feeling comfortable. This feeling has a role in building confidence and job satisfaction, according to several studies (Basalamah & As'ad, 2021; Utami & Vioeza, 2021). Each participant viewed comfort in the work environment with their own understanding of comfort. Comfort in the work environment was highlighted by the strong relationship between P9 and senior management, where they showed confidence in her. She expressed that by stating:

I feel free in my department, in making the decisions and development plans that I need. Although there is high-load work, I can feel the contribution we make as a quality department.

Whereas comfortable feelings for P12 were a result of deep understanding and clarity towards the policies and possible changes in her environment, she said that:

I really feel comfortable in my work; I have a good relationship with the senior leadership, and I know exactly the high efforts they were looking to achieve at the university, especially with the high demand after Vision 2030. In addition, I realise that change takes time, and there will be some unforeseen circumstances. However, the more ambitious we are, the more effort we need. And part of my responsibility is to understand and to allow change to progress in my college.

In addition, P15 viewed the achievements in her workplace as a factor that facilitates a feeling of comfortability. She added:

The more I can accomplish, the more I will definitely be happy. I think it's very important to be satisfied and proud of the progress I've made, and that's why I keep doing my role.

In summary, this theme is: Emotions of "comfortable" - referring to those that encourage individuals to exercise autonomy in decision-making, adjust to changes, and experience contentment with their advancements. This sentiment was strengthened by university policy, professional relationships, and upper management.

The negative feelings:

On the other hand, eight of the participants had negative feelings. This study has classified their negative feelings into two different themes: dissatisfaction and exhaustion.

- **Dissatisfied**

Dissatisfaction is defined as the disagreeable emotional state resulting from considering one's job as frustrating, which is associated with a lack of tangible performance to develop and improve due to challenges and also can be due to the lack of ability to change external factors related to the work environment (Azeem et al., 2020; Clark & Lake, 2020). The dissatisfied feelings have been shown in this study from different angles, such as

negative rivalry, poor handling of problems, and low progress. P10 described her environment as very competitive:

There's a lack of competence where people focus more on how they talk about themselves than they really do. This unfortunately created false competition that hears a lot and there is nothing on the ground.

Feelings of dissatisfaction were heightened by her colleagues' hypocritical behaviour; she noticed that they boast about their accomplishments in words but do little to back it up in actuality. However, this sentiment had an impact on her leadership self-efficacy because it increased the likelihood of creating problems with her team rather than finding solutions for them.

P11 was dissatisfied due to her weakness in dealing with issues and said that:

Most colleagues ignore talking about issues. This has led to the accumulation of the problem, and we end up facing a big and complex problem because of our unwillingness to deal with it, and that affects our development. Instead of focusing on growth, we become stuck in problems that were neglected from the beginning.

On the other hand, P11 was able to handle and focus on her goals and plans regardless of the annoying work culture in her environment. She said:

I know exactly what I have to do, and I am a person who does not stay in my role if I cannot make an improvement.

Further, P6 was unsatisfied with the regressiveness of her department; she commented:

Well, the workplace is the same since I knew this department; the senior leadership has no role in improvement; there is no conference; there is no activity that motivates people; you feel everything is unfortunately very stagnant.

However, her comment showed a decrease in the leadership's self-efficacy as she expected senior leadership to be fully responsible for change and, in return, limited her ability and eliminated her potential as head of department in influence.

- **Exhaustion**

Exhaustion refers to being fully fatigued by one's job obligations. Additionally, it has been identified as a crucial indicator of the first phase of "burnout," which is a state that describes professional stress and can have a substantial influence on an individual's capacity to accomplish one's role (Matthews & Rutherford, 2020; Zaid, 2019). P19 said that:

I felt exhausted, I am tired, and I am out of the energy due to the administrations' tasks that wait me every day.

Furthermore, P16 confirmed that the heavy work affected her desire to come to work and stated that:

There are a few days where, if the work has been done, I am happy. However, most days I feel the heavy tasks that await me, the emails to which I need to respond, the backlog of work that has not been completed and is waiting for follow-up, and other things that unfortunately have made me lose the desire to come to work.

P20 was similar to P16 and P19 in terms of feeling that their work demands endless effort:

It is challenging to sum up that in a single word; it depends on the pressure of the semester, the people in charge, and other factors. But in general, a lot of updated decisions and changes related to COVID-19 and policy updates—for example, changing the study year from two semesters to three—required a lot of sudden work not only for the staff but also for the students. Moreover, she felt unappreciated in general, and her job required "nonstop efforts".

To explore how all of the emotional themes have been discussed in the literature reviews, the following section presents the related discussion.

6.7. Discussion

This section focuses on discussing emotional influence as one of the sources of leadership self-efficacy. According to the self-efficacy theory, emotional influence has an impact on one's performance (Burić *et al.*, 2018; Murphy, 2016). If a person has positive feelings about performing their roles and duties, she will be able to do them effectively (Gozali, 2022). Additionally, this will enhance her aspirations, initiatives, and decisions (Debes, 2021; Dwyer, 2019). Nevertheless, negative feelings affect one's performance and ability to change (Machida and Schaubroeck, 2011; Eibl *et al.*, 2020).

The findings of this study explored the fact that the participants' feelings varied from one to another; thus, the results have divided the feelings into two main categories: positive and negative. The positive one was represented by grateful and comfortable feelings, while the negative feelings were exhaustion and dissatisfaction.

Participants who expressed their gratitude felt that this feeling encouraged them to increase their performance to make a more positive influence in their departments and on their work teams (Sun *et al.*, 2019). They were grateful for their teamwork collaboration, work atmosphere, and colleagues' support. The feeling of thanks strengthened motivational skills for respondents, who became keen to appreciate the team's efforts and thank them by all available means. Motivation is among the most important indicators of high self-efficacy in a leader (Tian *et al.*, 2019; Skaalvik, 2020). Also, it became apparent that the leader's motivations raised the team's high self-efficacy (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021). In addition, the feeling of internal gratitude contributed to strengthening the relations between the leader and the work team in this study, which in turn affected trust and productivity. It was confirmed that gratitude has a positive influence on strengthening work engagement, which has a positive influence on leadership self-efficacy (Xie *et al.*, 2020; Burić *et al.*, 2018).

Furthermore, the feeling of comfort has a positive influence on participants' leadership self-efficacy. Comfort is a positive emotion, yet how it is experienced varies from one to another at work. So, what one person finds comfortable may be uncomfortable for another or may not contribute to comfort. Because this study is qualitative, it explains the comfort felt from participants' views. Mugira (2022) stated that a sense of comfort in the workplace provides workers with a sense of pride towards their organisations, and it makes it hard for the employee to leave work, but rather on the contrary, the employee prefers to stay longer. Participants in this study found comfort in making independent decisions and being able to influence and achieve. Additionally, comfort was due to the trust in the workplace with the higher leadership, which enhanced understanding for unexpected changes (Basalamah & As'ad, 2021). A number of studies confirmed that positive feelings for an individual help to influence leadership self-efficacy positively (Locklear *et al.*, 2022; Wallin *et al.*, 2022; Singh *et al.*, 2019).

Negative emotions, on the other hand, are illustrated by exhaustion and dissatisfaction. Participants' exhaustion was a result of the workload, and this was confirmed by the Weißenfels *et al.* (2022) study, which stressed that emotional exhaustion is a negative feeling that affects an employee's desire to do their work. In addition, Al-Sharif (2018) stressed that the workload of Saudi women is one of the challenges that makes them get lost in tasks, worry, and distracts them – ultimately affecting their desire to apply for administrative positions. The findings of this study align with those of Al-Sharif (2018): participants lose their desire to come to the work for conducting the tasks. Therefore, this feeling affects their leadership self-efficacy (Skaalvik, 2020). While some participants have feelings of dissatisfaction, not all of these affect their leadership self-efficacy. This feeling appeared due to how participants in this study viewed their colleagues' behaviour and the high expectations from higher leadership. This was confirmed in a study conducted by Chiu *et al.* (2021), which found that dissatisfaction with leaders in the workplace can be the result of unconstructive communication that becomes a waste of their energy to perform. P11's finding was that she was able to focus on achieving developments regardless of the style and *modus operandi* of her colleagues. However, P6 and P10s' feelings of dissatisfaction affect their ability to perform effectively in the workplace. According to Al-Maaitah *et al.* (2021), dissatisfaction may influence individuals' motivations, so this affected P10 and P6 but not P11.

To conclude, feelings' influence in this study aligns with self-efficacy theory, which considers feelings as one of the sources of one's self-efficacy. Several studies discussed leaders' feelings (Sun *et al.*, 2019; Dwyer, 2019; Zineldin & Hytter, 2012; Humphrey, 2002; Van Kleef and Côté, 2022; Skaalvik, 2020) in terms of the effects on the workplace and their team's engagement and performance. The studies above confirmed that positive feelings affect leaders' performance positively, whereas negative emotions affect how they manage negatively. In contrast, in the Saudi context, there is a scarcity in discussing leaders' emotions and presenting them as sources of self-efficacy. However, a study by Al-Rashdi and Abdelwahed (2022) confirmed that positive feelings enhance Saudi women's empowerment by increasing their self-efficacy. In addition, a study by Alsadaan *et al.* (2021) among leaders' nurses in Saudi Arabia mentioned that negative feelings such as disappointment are one of the challenges in performing their role

efficiently. Further, a study in Jordan discussing the self-efficacy of academic leaders and its' relation to emotional regulations, reaffirmed that negative and positive feelings affect leaders' performance either negatively or positively related to their type (Bazadough & Sulaiman, 2023).

As a researcher conducting this study, this reminds me of the different emotional states that I examined relating to my own work experience. I worked in five different branches for the organisation, where I met new people, new challenges, new managers, and operation managers, and was able to observe customer behaviour. Each branch created an emotional state: branches where I felt exhausted and burned out, and on the other hand, branches where I felt stability and had a positive feeling towards my work, and that influenced my desire to be creative and to achieve more, either negatively or positively.

6.8. Verbal effects

This is the final source of self-efficacy leadership to be discussed in this research. Verbal influences are verbal messages that occur in the workplace due to daily communication, feedback, achievement, or failure (Slåtten, 2014). In addition, their impact, especially if the statements are compelling, may extend to the impact on the confidence and productivity of the individual's performance. Its impact can be enhanced through attitudes towards colleagues, their experiences, personal relationships, and credibility (Baker, 2022). The results of this study divided the results into three core themes: positive, negative, and neutral. Table 16 below presents the numbers assigned to the participants.:

Verbal effects	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Sample number 18	7	8	3

Table 16: verbal effects.

Positive words

- **Thankful words**

An appreciation of the workplace has been presented in a book by Chapman and White (2019) under the title *Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*. They confirmed that appreciation enhances individuals' job satisfaction and increases their productivity. It represents the positive verbal theme. P8, in her response, stated that:

Well, I cannot remember any other words in my work except the deep thanks that we really exchange and have a deep appreciation for each other's support.

Moreover, P14 found that most of the time, her colleagues or higher leadership were offering support. She said:

I always hear supportive words, especially from the dean; for example, she asked me if I had any questions about anything or if there was anything I needed.

P15 was happy with her bias towards her university and said:

I am biased towards my university and proud of that, the work environment is excellent, and the appreciation in the workplace is high, and to be honest without appreciation who can work.

The thankful words were the most resonated word in the workplace with eight participants, which reflect the positive atmosphere and good connections. According to these respondents, they received this from their colleagues, achieved tasks, and gained it from the University's atmosphere in their department.

- **Negative words**
 - **Religious titles**

This is the theme of just one participant; she is working at a gender-segregated University where religious culture is dominant. I found it significant to present this theme because it is related to one of the main values for Saudi people, that of religion (Al-Dakheel, 2012). According to several scholars, religious factors affect women's empowerment in leadership positions (Alsubhi *et al.*, 2020; Abalkhail, 2017). In particular, Saudi society, male dominance was a significant factor due to the Sahwa movement that was presented in the literature review (Alhazmi, 2022; Alzahrani, 2023). The religious title present in this

study is *Sheikh* instead of *Dr* at the university, which is uncommon in other universities, and this title refers to people who were known for their high social or religious status for their knowledge, money, and wisdom in society (Islamqa, 2021). This title is mostly used for men, not women, which contributes to making unfair preferences due to gender and title. P11 stressed that the environment is dominated by religious classifications, such as "Sheikh", and stated that:

When we are in a meeting, they say, "God bless you, Sheikhs." But I am not a sheikh. And there is another committee of representatives of colleges, which is an important committee and has to do with promotions, so when the conversation always begins with God bless you, our sheikhs, what do you think, sheikhs? This is the thing that makes me feel, in an indirect way, that I am not a priority and that they discriminate against me.

This title is reflecting respect for the presence of men or for a certain man among a group of men in Saudi culture. Being a woman working with men after the changes of Vision 2030 for the first time, using this title in the workplace enhances the feeling of being excluded and may affect the power of women's voices.

- **Jealousy words**

P17 and P10 stated that most of the words in their workplace refer to jealousy, harmful rivalry and envy. P17 said that:

Unfortunately, colleagues always make me feel uncomfortable by adding hidden comparative language as an example: I am the best at this task or skill, or I have known about this, or it can be questioning for minimising your efforts.

Furthermore, P10 mentioned that:

Unfortunately, the majority in the meetings try to prove themselves to be the best in terms of skills, thinking and decisions, and in fact all of this causes disharmony between us as colleagues in the work environment.

- **Unappreciated**

Recognition was highlighted as a supporter and catalyst for a positive culture and supportive communication among employees, while a lack of appreciation affected all of

that (Chapman & White, 2019; Hamilton, 2017). Three participants were disappointed by their heavy workload, with no thanks from the team or even support. P20 commented that:

All I heard were words of disrespect and grumbling in front of hard work that requires constant efforts, everyone in the department feels tired as if she is the only one with work pressure.

In addition, the absence of words is considered a negative influence for P16, who cannot find support from her colleagues. She said that:

I feel lonely in doing my tasks; I face issues with the lack of cooperation among my colleagues; I cannot mention any words because I do not even feel like I see them physically in the department.

To conclude, the negative words were jealousy and unappreciated which reflect the toxic environment and poor communication. All of the words influence how leaders perform and interact toward their work goals.

The results above of verbal influence varied between positive and negative; the negative creates conflicts in relationships, trust issues, discrimination, or it may contribute to the exhaustion feeling that has been presented earlier. Whereas the positive words raise the positivity in the work vibe and support.

- **Neutral**

The last main theme is being neutral, and it relates to the three participants in this study. It means the unidentified words where participants do not associate' words related to their workplace. For example, P7 confirmed that:

The words and feelings of the environment cannot be specified; every day is different, and every member of the workplace responds in a different way.

Further, P9 does not care about verbal effects; she said that whether people's words were negative or positive, it did not affect her. That is because she is very focused on her work and goals.

I believe presenting a neutral theme is important because it can relate to one of the significant skills for leaders, which is emotional intelligence. More details can be found in the discussion section.

6.9. Discussion

The verbal effects source has been defined and highlighted in several studies that investigated various samples, such as students and employees, and in various sectors, such as health care, sports, and education (Cansiz & Cansiz, 2019; Shirey, 2020; Moran *et al.*, 2021; Hepler *et al.*, 2021). According to self-efficacy theory, verbal influence is one of the sources that can enhance or reduce one's self-efficacy. This study aims to explore the role of verbal sources for academic Saudi women's leaders in Higher Education. The findings indicate that fifteen participants out of eighteen were able to recall a specific phrase, either a positive or negative word.

The positive words were represented by thankful and supportive words, and according to the participants, this provides them with support, creates a pleasant environment, and makes them feel valued. Liang *et al.* (2023) emphasised that words related to encouragement, positive feedback, and that supportive words contribute to the growth of creative self-efficacy in individuals. In addition, positive words are a form of positive communication that is critical for their goals' formulation and clarity, developing positive beliefs, and enhancing workforce performance (Muthusamy, 2019). Also, positive feedback and external motivation contribute to the development of beliefs in one's own abilities to lead and achieve goals (Johnson, 2017; Baker, 2022).

In contrast, the negative words were symbolised by three themes: religious titles, jealousy words, and feeling unappreciated. Religious titles such as "Sheikh" can increase nepotism and discrimination (Shubayra *et al.*, 2022; Alotaibi & Campbell, 2022). This suggests that despite the change as a result of Vision 2030 to enable women to reach leadership positions, the language of communication used may not be affected by the new culture, and women may still be suffering from a sense of discrimination. Discrimination has a psychological and interpersonal effect and is a barrier to improving their skills, professional expertise, and effectiveness (Shubayra *et al.*, 2022).

Moreover, jealousy and competitiveness are expressed verbally in the workplace in a hidden way where each one tries to show her superiority over the other or reduce the value of the other colleague's efforts. According to Rasool *et al.* (2021), an unhealthy workplace environment negatively impacts employee engagement. This is connected to the verbal influence in this study as one of the sources of self-efficacy. Furthermore, they found that the emotions associated with a toxic working environment, such as bullying and loneliness, can be destructive and result in burnout and depression among staff. Further, the results of Al-Hazmi's (2020) study indicate that words of jealousy in Saudi universities are one of the elements that contributed to the existence of toxic environments.

Appreciation is one of the most important words, but it was absent, which created negativity. Holmes and Parker (2017) focused on the importance of communication, stating that a lack of communication resulted in the absence of leadership, the absence of performance, and the loss of organisation. Absence of appreciation influenced the P20 performance, to the extent that she felt exhausted. Additionally, the absence of words has the same influence on P16, where it makes her feel that her role is more difficult and increases the issues she faces alone without support. Appreciation has a role in increasing satisfaction and productivity; it also has a role in enhancing cooperation and resilience, where employees work harder to achieve the targets in the workplace, whereas unappreciation influences all of these issues negatively (Assiry *et al.*, 2022; Al-Omar *et al.*, 2019).

The final aspect in the verbal source is the neutral one. It is a theme where verbal effects have no influence on participants' performance or emotions. However, it can be explained as emotional intelligence. It is defined by having self-awareness and self-management where the leader is able to control feelings and not relate them to one situation (Gómez-Leal *et al.*, 2022). It can be confirmed that there is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and one's self-efficacy (McLaughlin, 2019; Chigeda *et al.*, 2022). Self-efficacy strengthens leaders' ambitions and allows them to focus on the areas where they should devote their attention, providing them with the endurance required to overcome challenges (Skaalvik, 2020). Additionally, P9 expressed her emotions towards

her work environment through her achievements. This confirmed that neutral words can relate to the leaders' high ability to concentrate and provide them with resilience (Gómez-Leal *et al.*, 2022).

To conclude, the verbal source has been considered to be the least influential source of self-efficacy by Bandura (1999), but Fathi *et al.* (2020) found that this had a significant impact on motivation and self-efficacy in the Iranian educational context. Furthermore, this study revealed that this particular source significantly influences leadership self-efficacy. Several studies have studied the role of verbal influence as a vital source (Hendricks, 2016; Phan, 2012; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012; Machida & Schaubroeck, 2011; Salanova *et al.*, 2022; Kariuki, 2020; Shirey, 2020). The studies above found that verbal sources enhance behaviour, performance, and motivation. The international studies discussed this source's impact on leaders' development, leaders' and employee motivations, and building leadership competencies for students. Nevertheless, the Saudi research fields have a scarcity of investigated leadership self-efficacy, with most of the research centred on areas such as learning languages and teaching (Alnahdi, 2020; Mehmood, 2019; Alrehaili, 2021; Alqahtani, 2019). The researchers who employed self-efficacy in leadership and women's empowerment were Alfrayan, 2014; Almutairi, 2020; Al-Rashdi and Abdelwahed, 2022; Cherian and Jacob, 2013; Alhalafi, 2022; and Al-Qahtani *et al.*, 2021). However, Saudi research does not explore verbal sources as a factor influencing their respondents' participation. Communication and the words that are employed are a significant core of women's daily work in leadership, especially with the Vision 2030 changes (Abalkhail, 2017; Davidsson, 2022). Therefore, this research advises conducting future research to explore the verbal source and its impact on leadership self-efficacy.

6.10. Conclusion

The four sources of leadership self-efficacy for Saudi women in academic leadership positions have been represented in this chapter. The first source was experience, which was classified into four categories based on its type: no prior experience, single experience, prior multi-experience, and new authorities' positions. It has also been demonstrated how each form of experience contributed to their present position. The second source was that of courses and role models, which were discussed in terms of

their influence and relationship to their performance. The final two sources were emotional and spoken influences. Each source has been presented individually in terms of the impact on their workplace, teams, and personal behaviour. The next chapter of this study will present the Saudi women's beliefs and how these influence and impact on their leadership self-efficacy.

Chapter 7: Self-efficacy beliefs

7. Introduction

This is the second chapter relating to the findings and discussion sections of this thesis. The purpose of this study was to investigate how Saudi women's leadership self-efficacy has been influenced by the environments and beliefs they have. The sample of this study covered four governmental universities in Riyadh.

The research question that guided the study was: What shapes the self-efficacy and leadership styles of Saudi women leaders in higher education? Leading from this question, the chapter will now look at:

- How do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?

The self-efficacy, as discussed in the third chapter, is influenced by both internal and external influences. Beliefs and organisational context are significant factors. In this chapter, I will focus on exploring the beliefs associated with the insider component to develop a comprehensive knowledge of self-efficacy. The discussion on the outsider element will be presented in a subsequent chapter.

The issue of belief is one of the core components that influence one's self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001; Murphy, 2016). Belief is defined as the individual's expectation that one can effectively perform one's aims (Moran *et al.*, 2021). Both positive and negative beliefs influence one's performance (Shirey, 2020; Murphy, 2016). Bandura *et al.* (1999) research emphasis the significance of beliefs in the growth and achievement of individuals' self-efficacy. They claim that these beliefs are weak and rely on the veracity of sources, the strength of the belief, and the power of intervening experiences. According to them, people need regularly reflect on their achievements and setbacks in order to revise their self-efficacy beliefs. Another thing they stress is the need of self-efficacy when

things get tough. People who have strong beliefs in themselves are able to persevere and even thrive when things get tough.

Thus, this chapter aims to explore the self-efficacy beliefs of Saudi women in academic leadership positions, and how those influence their leadership's self-efficacy. According to several Saudi and international scholars, personal barriers are one of the obstacles for women in their career leadership progression in Higher Education; for example, self-confidence and underestimating their skills (Alotaibi, 2020; Al-Qahtani *et al.*, 2021; Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Savigny, 2014). However, there is a huge shift currently in Saudi women's empowerment, according to the Saudi Vision 2030 (Alharbi, 2022). It is significant to understand what beliefs women have about their roles; what strengthens or weakens the belief in their ability to manage their position? Next, how does this relate to their leadership's self-efficacy? Furthermore, women have a lower representation in leadership positions than men, according to global evidence (Denizci Guillet *et al.*, 2019; Smirles *et al.*, 2020). However, according to women, they are rated as having higher capabilities in leadership compared to men (Zenger & Folkman, 2019). Therefore, this research question aims to understand women's beliefs towards academic leadership positions in Saudi Higher Education.

RQ2: How do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?

To answer this question, the data was analysed employing the theoretical category belief to find out the relative themes as explained in the methodology chapter. The results are divided into two main themes in terms of the impact of the respondents' beliefs on their self-efficacy after starting their duties: a) low leadership self-efficacy; b) high leadership self-efficacy; then under each subtitle there are two additional types of beliefs (positive and negative). Accordingly, the findings in this chapter will be provided in two primary sections:

- The first part addresses both positive and negative beliefs that have led to low self-efficacy in leadership. Next, the findings of the level of self-efficacy will be addressed related to each belief, and finally the discussion of the first findings' section.

- In the second finding's section, the beliefs and findings will be presented that reflect high leadership self-efficacy. This section discusses both positive and negative beliefs and how they affect one's level of self-efficacy. Finally, the study will provide a discussion of the findings.

7.1. Findings

7.2. Low leadership self-efficacy

The findings represent the views of eighteen women who have worked as Heads of Departments and Deans in Saudi Higher Education. Five of the respondents have low leadership self-efficacy. For five of the participants, their self-efficacy has been negatively influenced by prior beliefs that do not support attributes pertaining to successful leadership behaviour (low self-efficacy). Low self-efficacy is defined in this study with regard to the findings: lower endurance, desires, and efforts, as well as how respondents manage the obstacles they face together with their teams and plans (Mohr, 2018; Dwyer, 2019; McCormick, 2001). The results indicate that only one of the respondents has low belief about her ability to perform the role, whereas four participants have high or positive beliefs with regards to their ability to perform their roles. In the following sections, the relative themes are presented and discussed.

➤ **Negative Beliefs:**

○ **Uncertainty and lack of interest**

Uncertainty about what role, tasks, or what a leader can do or change is one of the beliefs that has been revealed by P6. This has been defined as the belief resulting from unexpected difficulties in the work environment, causing the leader to be doubtful about the importance of her role or the effectiveness of her skills (Leach *et al.*, 2013).

P6 showed a lack of interest before doubting herself; she stated in response to the interview question, *why did you apply to be a head of department?*:

I am not interested in administrative work, and I do not find myself in it; I love teaching a lot, but my colleagues offered me these tasks because the majority had already performed them, and I agreed.

Next, her response to *how do you find your role after starting it?*, suggests high caution to talking openly. She concluded her statement by describing that her experience is too scant, being just three years in leadership and twenty years in teaching:

Expectations are usually high for anyone in an administrative position to change, but you face the reality that it is difficult to change anything because of the work system. In general, I am not talking about myself because my administrative experience is limited, and I cannot make definitive judgments.

➤ **Positive Beliefs:**

On the other hand, four participants were opposed to the views of P6 in terms of having higher and more positive beliefs towards their roles. Nevertheless, in this study, positive beliefs do not contribute to building high self-efficacy for participants in this research.

The following themes represent their positive principals:

○ **Easy:**

P16 was completely surprised that the role did not meet her expectations but was the complete opposite of 'easy to do':

Ah, no, my perceptions have totally changed. I expected it; frankly, it is easier. I expected to find cooperation. Uh, it will be easy. I expected that the entire department would work with me, but I was surprised that I work alone. So, when you find an issue, you have to solve it and find ideas and solutions all by yourself. I expected it to be a comfortable and beautiful role, but the thing is not that it is not sweet, but it is very difficult.

P16, her beliefs about the role were not helpful in performing her job; it put her in a hard situation where she was surprised about the high demand expected of her as a leader.

○ **Regular role**

P7 confirmed that being an academic member is not enough to prepare you for the Head of Department role; where her beliefs normalise the Head of Department's duties, which she discovered later are not what she expected:

I expected it to be like any normal task because, previously, as an academic member with twenty years of experience, I was able to achieve my tasks, but unfortunately, the Head of Department role has a much wider and larger role in reality than my previous role. It is full of challenges.

Moreover, P17 who has experience in various leadership roles in her college, emphasised that the Head of Department role is not like other administrative roles.

My perceptions are certainly completely different. I mean, I was expecting the department presidency to be complementary to the administration work series, but I found that the Head of Department is completely different because you deal with students, faculty members, parents, and different problems that are exposed to sudden events in the department that you do not have in mind. So, the position of Head of Department—I consider it one of the most difficult that a faculty member can bear in charge of it, and it differs from the rest of the administrative roles.

P7 and P17's lack of preparation and experience contributes to an unsupportive image of the Head of Department role, which in turn makes the challenges more difficult to handle.

- **High self-confidence**

P10 represents the confidence theme; she has a positive perception of her abilities to do everything due to the various experiences that she has had. Her response was:

I gained a sort of a thousand experiences, meaning a variety of experiences such as being a consultant for the university's scientific research and coordinator of the college, and I also completed conducting projects from A to Z. When I became a Dean with administrative work experience, the only thing new to me was dealing with the staff. I have employees of a full deanship; the new thing only is managing human resources. This is the new one, but thank God it took time at the beginning, but everything is fine.

To summarise, their beliefs have been developed from positive to negative. The negative belief was the uncertainty, and the positive was that they considered their role as an easy, regular one and recognised her ability to be fully confident. In the following section, it will illustrate how these beliefs impact their leadership self-efficacy.

7.3. Evidence of low leadership self-efficacy

This section will report upon how the above participants' beliefs have affected their leadership self-efficacy. Low leadership self-efficacy reflects each individual's endurance, desires, and efforts, as well as how they manage the obstacles they face and their teams and plans (McCormick, 2001; Lartey *et al.*, 2023; Dwyer, 2019). This study examined the manner in which the following participants' replies revealed relative behaviours as a result of leadership self-efficacy level.

Self-efficacy levels	P/ Numbers	Beliefs		Behavior consequences
Low Leadership Self-Efficacy	1	Negative Beliefs	Uncertainty	She underestimated her ability which resulted in: -an inability to develop and influence in her workplace. - blaming to the regression and failure to the plans in her work.
	4	Positive Beliefs	Easy	-Difficulties in employing her plans and ability to set goals
			Regular role	-Unable to deal with multi-dimensional issues
			Over-Confidence	-Team's resistance -High tensions with colleagues in her college -Unable to motivate and strengthen teams' capabilities.

Table 17: Low leadership self-efficacy.

The data presented at Table 17 above, indicates that the respondents' have a low level of leadership self-efficacy. They faced challenges when they began working in the actual environment, despite the fact that the majority of them held optimistic views. In the table, each belief subject is represented by the specific behaviour each respondent performed when coping with hurdles and teamwork. Inability to modify, problems dealing with a specific plan, challenges in responding effectively to multidimensional circumstances, and failure to cultivate a pleasant collaborative environment are all signs of low leadership self-efficacy.

As an example of the belief of uncertainty, which is associated with low of self-efficacy as she indicated that goals cannot be achieved if you do not have a competent team.

However, leaders with high self-efficacy believe in their ability to develop their team and make a positive impact (Shirey, 2020; Baker, 2022). In addition, the respondent P6 was underestimated and limited in the authority, influence, and importance of her role:

Goals sometimes succeed, and some of it gets hindered depending on the people who work with you. If people share the same vision or goals with you. I guess because my interest is purely educational, I'm sure it will succeed, but the administration is hindering development and routine work, and you do not have the ability to influence. My role is just a head department, it is not a high position.

Whereas P16 and P17, who have easy and regular role beliefs, have had their leadership self-efficacy negatively affected by showing less endurance to deal with challenges. P16 commented that:

You just find yourself surrounded by a multitude of issues in a helpless situation, and you are the only one who is in charge. It is a really hard role.

Moreover, P17, who has various management roles, confirmed that performing the Head of Department role is considered one of the hardest because she has to deal with unexpected and multidimensional difficulties from those such as students, academic staff, parents, together with new implications.

In P10, low leadership self-efficacy was found when she stated that dealing with teams is the only new skill that she will start employing, and she justified that she was able to manage it. But, in fact, she faced high resistance according to the issues she mentioned:

The mentality of employees is the usual mentality of government sector employees; they do not want to work hard or develop themselves.

She proceeded to describe her team's lack of professional work mentality. Her beliefs about herself are high, but her performance in managing the team does not match her self-description. Leadership self-efficacy is positively connected to a leader's ability to motivate and understand her team's needs. Her case is also an example of how having high beliefs doesn't always support leadership self-efficacy. Additionally, she believed that she can achieve any tasks personally, but this high self-confidence does not support having influence to manage her team.

7.4. Low leadership self-Efficacy discussion

In the discussion section, I will explore and interpret the study's findings, providing insights into the implications and significance of the results above.

The results revealed that for five of the participants in this study, their beliefs were not sufficient to build their leadership self-efficacy. One of them has negative belief, while other participants have positive beliefs. However, after running their roles, their self-perceptions have either contradicted or aligned with their prior beliefs. According to the self-efficacy theory, one's beliefs are the most fundamental and influential factor that improves a leader's self-efficacy (Dwyer, 2019; Code 2020). Leadership self-efficacy is the ability of a leader to motivate, set goals, solve problems, manage their challenges, and create a supportive environment (Lartey *et al.*, 2023). However, this study has shown that having positive beliefs does not always mean having high leadership self-efficacy in performing one's role. Participants in this section may have high self-efficacy in teaching and research competencies, but not in administrative roles such as Head of Department and Dean. As this study investigates leadership self-efficacy, it can be confirmed that one of the participant's cases (P6) corresponds with the theory statement that negative beliefs lead to low or passive self-efficacy. In contrast, the other four participants expressed high expectations and positive beliefs about their ability to manage their roles, which in fact did not match reality.

To explain more about their positive beliefs in relation to low leadership self-efficacy, the sources of the respondents' high beliefs were not acquired from prior management experience in the same role. Therefore, their beliefs build on their ability to manage their lecturer's role. Experience has been confirmed by Bandura as one of the sources for building self-efficacy, as discussed in the first chapter (Lartey *et al.*, 2023; Murphy, 2016). Additionally, a lack of realistic understanding of the role results in adapting beliefs based on unrealistic expectations, where it has been described that the Head of Department role is easy to do. Further, the high confidence that P10 was distinguished by, as she said that she can do anything from A to Z, does not meet with her understanding of the concept of leadership itself. It has been clarified by Barton (2010), who mentioned an example of the differences between self-confidence and self-efficacy. He mentioned an example for one can't swim and how that related to self-efficacy and self-confidence. This study

summarises the differences and adds how those differences work for leadership self-efficacy, *as below*:

Characteristics	Self-confidence	Self-efficacy	Characteristics	Leadership Self-efficacy behavior according to self-confidence in (this study)
Leader	Low confidence	Low self- efficacy	Leadership Behavior	She will not be able to lead
Leader	High confidence	Low self- efficacy		Excited to promote and to lead but she will not be able to deal with challenges and issues
Leader	Low confidence	High self- efficacy		She will be cautious, unable to change, influence or improve team
Leader	High confidence	High self- efficacy		She will lead effectively, with high creative initiative, problem solving skills, and ability to motivate the team.
Leader	Over-confidence	Low self- efficacy		Her elevated standards for her persona and competencies might not align with the requirements of her group, potentially giving rise to complications rather than progress.

Table 18: confidence and leadership self-efficacy.

Table 18 above explains how an individual having low confidence with low self-efficacy, and high confidence with low self-efficacy will negatively influence the final outcomes. While having high self-efficacy and low confidence, one can perform, but not in leadership - only in individual tasks. Meanwhile high confidence and high self-efficacy will enable one to have an exceptional and effective performance.

Therefore, this study will add an extra explanation to the differences between self-efficacy, high self-confidence, and over-confidence in leadership. Firstly, leadership is a group of competencies that help leaders understand and manage their teams emotionally and technically to achieve their goals by motivating them and understanding their needs to reach the final organisational objectives (Atrizka & Pratama, 2022). The lack of clarity

of what leadership is affects the adapted beliefs, which are constructed based on personal skills and achievements in individual tasks, while leadership should influence the team through understanding human relationships, personalities, and abilities that are called soft skills. Moreover, it was agreed by Dwyer (2019) and Machida & Schaubroeck (2011) that overconfidence in an individual's ability may not lead to the development of leadership skills but rather to self-satisfaction and a low understanding of team management. Therefore, self-efficacy positively correlates with high confidence, but overconfidence will negatively impact the leader's self-efficacy. Consequently, P10 described her team as having a "governmental work mindset," which refers to its weaknesses. All of those expressions showed how she perceived her team having a negative impact on building a motivated atmosphere. In addition, she faced resistance that created high tensions in her college. It was approved that one of a leader's skills is managing her emotions to be able to deal with challenges; this is presented in the first chapter (Atrizka & Pratama, 2022).

Moving to a global perspective, numerous studies search for the self-efficacy of women's beliefs - how to build them, how they improved during the histories of women of different culture - and how stereotypes and challenges affect women's leadership access (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023; Nakamura *et al.*, 2022; Eibl *et al.*, 2020; Paglis, 2010; Dwyer, 2019; Ruggs *et al.*, 2023; Murphy, 2016; Mohr, 2018). Moreover, Nakamura *et al.*'s (2022) study that covered women who worked in various countries such as Australia, India, Austria, and the United States, explored the importance of developing women's beliefs as a key factor that leadership courses should employ. The reason for this is a lack of experience and training that causes low self-confidence, uncertainty about how to lead, teamwork issues, and an inability to understand stereotypes. All of this aligns with the findings of this study, where participants' beliefs were influenced by low confidence, a lack of knowledge and experience that led to facing team conflicts and difficulty managing issues. Additionally, Hartman & Barber (2020) confirmed that engaging women with the same opportunities as men in leadership roles positively enhances their own perceptions. This encourages them to make decisions and take risks, which enhances positive perceptions in management roles.

However, in the Saudi research, it was highlighted that self-confidence, lack of training, and lack of experience all cause challenges for Saudi women to perform their leadership roles (Abalkhail, 2017; Hodges ,2017; Alsubaie & Jones ,2017; Gazzaz, 2017). The earlier studies' findings agreed with this thesis in terms of lack of experience and training being one of the problems that influenced the respondents' beliefs. For example, in lacking realism and the "regular role" belief that causes a lack of self-efficacy in leadership. Training and experience are sources for building self-efficacy, as has been presented and discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

Furthermore, a lack of independence affects women's ability to perform their leadership tasks, such as solving problems, as has been discussed in several studies (Gazzaz, 2017; Abalkhail, 2017; Alotaibi, 2020; Akbar *et al.*, 2023). Gazzaz's (2017) and Akbar *et al.*'s (2023) findings are congruent with the results of this thesis, where one of the participant's beliefs was "uncertainty" stemming from a lack of authority, which led to low confidence and inability for the woman to change as a leader. All of the above research in Saudi Arabia discussed external sources such as experience and training and how they influenced women's confidence and empowerment. Thus, the findings 'of this study have significantly to understanding how the inner women's' beliefs have considerably affected their behaviour. This is essential to comprehend their in-depth beliefs, as a Saudi woman who has experienced both limitations due to various difficulties and empowerment due to the new change, as mentioned in the literature review sections. In addition, the present findings will help to discover what types of beliefs support or frustrate women's performance. All these findings contribute to the enhancement of the growth and development of Saudi women's leadership and a deep understanding of their internal challenges.

To conclude, the findings recommend further studies to understand how women's beliefs have been constructed and discover the factors that have influenced these developments. Additionally, in the Saudi context, it is significant to understand how their beliefs have shifted during Vision 2030, and what factors support them under this change.

7.5. Findings

7.6. High leadership self-efficacy

High leadership self-efficacy has been discerned in the majority of the participants in this study. Thirteen out of eighteen have high leadership self-efficacy; however, not all of them are distinguished by high beliefs. Three of them have passive beliefs, but they were able to change after starting to manage their positions. Meanwhile the other ten individuals have motivated beliefs.

➤ Negative beliefs

Three participants out of eighteen have negative beliefs, but that does not affect their leadership self-efficacy. Fears, femininity, and conflict atmosphere are the themes that have been extracted according to the findings below:

- **Fears**

Fear is a feeling of anxiety resulting from not knowing what is coming, the results, or the evaluation they will receive (Syed *et al.*, 2021; Wisse *et al.*, 2019; Hampton, 2013). In this study, the fears and anxiety towards managing Head of Department positions were demonstrated by P8's beliefs. She stated that:

In the beginning, there were difficulties, I mean, it was a new department, there was an inner fear that work would be difficult despite the fact that there were reducing in teaching load. But I said let me start working since the department is in need.

P8 was apprehensive about managing this new role due to her inexperience and the need to establish this new department.

- **I am a woman**

The current change in empowerment for Saudi women in academic leadership positions due to Vision 2030 does not always seem promising for women's inner beliefs. For example, P15, who is the first woman in her college running the two sections for men and women, expressed her fear of being judged as a woman due to possible failures or mistakes. Many studies have shown that one of the challenges women faces is stereotyping and prejudice (Smirles *et al.*, 2020; Alharbi, 2022). Although she had the

opportunity here to be empowered and run willingly, the fear of failure and judgements threatened her beliefs about her abilities to succeed. She expressed that by saying:

Even though I requested this role, I was afraid at first because everyone will judge me as a woman and compare me with you know the previous male colleagues.

- **Conflicts**

Conflicts in P19's department create a high level of negative tension that affects her desire and aspiration to promote herself. P19 was afraid of being Head of Department because of the teamwork atmosphere. She said that:

The prior head of department was from different college and different subject. This created issues, such as the fact that she was not able to meet the needs of the faculty members, understand their fears, and handle the challenges properly.

In return, this reality created prior negative beliefs and interpretations about her current role.

Frankly, I had some fears at the beginning; I was not sure if those issues were due to the academic members' personalities or to the previous head of department. I expected that the same conflicts among team members would happen again but thank God it does not.

Conflicts, lack of understanding and lack of satisfaction in the work environment led to an impact on her beliefs, and there was a perception within her that her new role might not make any difference or solve problems.

Nevertheless, she took the step and accepted being in this role instead of bringing in someone from another department:

I always thought if the department were run by a member of the same department, she would deal with the department's problems in another way. But the circumstances of the faculty members did not allow them to run the role. Because they were associated with administrative work for higher positions, or they had health conditions or something else, so I had to take the step and hold the position.

Taking the step and initiating the solution despite the uncertainty about the feasibility of the solution is an indication of high leadership self-efficacy, and this is what will be discussed in the discussion section.

➤ **Positive beliefs**

The positive beliefs that enhance the growth of their leadership self-efficacy are related to various reasons, such as aspirations, experience, knowledge, well-preparedness, and confidence. In this qualitative study, ten of the eighteen participants demonstrated a high level of belief.

• **Aspirations**

Aspiration to leadership positions as a step taken has been argued widely in terms of gender aspirations (Sanchez & Lehnert, 2019; Hartman & Barber, 2020). It suggests that women compared to men are less likely to aspire to leadership positions. However, it is a belief that P5 has the strength to seek the opportunity of being Head of Department in her college, she said.

I am not new to administrative roles; my contact with my colleagues helped me a lot to understand a lot of administrative work, and I have worked on many committees to form decisions for the college. So, I found myself aspiring to be a department head, so I followed the administrative conditions and applied.

Additionally, P13, who indicated her fondness for administrative duties, has also highlighted aspirations as a drive. She described it as a management role that allows you to meet new people, discover what is impeding people's advancement, and delight in seeing your goals fulfilled.

I love the administrative work. I mean, I have a desire for administrative work. You know the story Salwa, I do not know if you are a lecturer at a university or not. There is a reluctance to work in administrative work for the educational staff because it has additional burdens on the teaching staff, students' research, the department's development committees, and arbitration in research tools. For this reason, they are thinking ahead about accepting this position, but for me, despite the administrative work tasks, I love the administrative work. I like it a lot. It allows meeting new characters, getting to

know their different personalities at work, and watching the progress towards your goals.

Furthermore, P14's aspirations were due to the high curiosity to know more about the organisations, as she is a new member. She said:

Being in a leadership or management role will enable one to know the organisation's system and structure. I believe that management roles are the best and shortest option for that, and that is why, honestly, I nominated myself for this role.

- **I have qualifications (Merit):**

Although a PhD is a qualification owned by all participants in this thesis, for P11, it was a reason for her to distinguish herself positively. The qualifications that P11 gained due to her experience and certificate support her beliefs in accepting her current position. It is noticeable that she feels that she deserves to be nominated for several opportunities, and she confirmed that she is the one who chose which opportunity she prefers from the abundance it offers. She comments that:

What I did at work earlier supported me in getting to this position. I receive many nominations for different positions, but I choose the job position that I perform best in, on the one hand, the position of the e-learning agent in two aspects, the learning side, and I am an assistant professor, so I am generally teaching, and of course I have technical backgrounds, where my doctoral thesis was on artificial intelligence. For me, the qualifications were there from this angle. My previous work, which I chose, was accepting a position in the Vision 2030 Office. It helped me have a deeper understanding of the Kingdom's future directions.

P11 builds her beliefs based on her qualifications, knowledge, and experience, which positively reinforces her beliefs about her ability to lead and her entitlement to opportunities.

- **High self-confidence**

It has been confirmed that confidence is positively correlated with self-efficacy (Murphy, 2016; Shirey, 2020). Additionally, Self-efficacy relates to how a person performs and provides insight into confidence, but confidence is not always helpful in figuring out self-

efficacy, as pointed out in the first section of the discussion (Zaman *et al.*, 2021; Barton, 2011). Furthermore, confidence is one of the core beliefs discussed that reinforces or prevents women's desire to apply for leadership positions (Herbst, 2020; Zenger & Folkman, 2019). P18's response was that her confidence is built by her imagination to hold this position, and that is how she is being encouraged to improve her skills and seek opportunities. She said:

I was fully imagining how to reach a position close to the decision-maker or contribute to the opportunity to make a decision. Additionally, I contributed to making some decisions in the field of quality at the university. I was also close to the decision-maker, so they heard my views, and I gave my opinions based on the experiences that I had, all of which were very positive. In my opinion, I find that a person does not seek a position unless she has already prepared herself for it; the perception will be very similar to that of a very large percentage, and there is a difference between those who assume a position and those who do not know the dimensions and requirements of this position.

Moreover, P9's confidence stemmed from her high talents and expertise, which were reinforced within her environment, where the senior management who nominated her told her that she was the only one capable of this position. She stated that:

I was nominated by the senior management because the nature of work is difficult, and it requires a leadership personality to lead and be patient. They considered me the right person for this place and told me that no one can do it if you do not accept it. As you know, there is a similarity between what I am currently doing and my previous experience. Additionally, the nature of work here is not like doing research because management has to look at the team's goals, cooperation, and plans, whereas research is your personal interest.

Experience as a tangible source contributed to influencing the confidence in P20 and P12.

P20 responded by:

The length of experience in managing things prepares me for the next step in running the role. The university and academic year have a certain routine in multiple periods, for example, the period of schedules and the period for exams. I mean, every year these works are required at the same time of the year, so of course experience gives you the advantage of being equipped before. I mean, you become aware of what is basically required in your role.

To summarise, the beliefs that have been presented by this group are of two kinds. The first one is more negative: fears, I am a woman, and conflicts. While the second type is related to motivated and positive beliefs, For example, aspirations, high confidence, and qualifications. To explore how those beliefs impact their leadership self-efficacy, the following paragraph illustrates the relative findings.

7.7. Evidence on high leadership self-efficacy

As has been mentioned before, this chapter investigates Saudi women's leadership self-efficacy in academic roles and how it is influenced by their beliefs. As a result, the findings highlighted the beliefs they held about their jobs. Thus, this part provides details that explore how their leadership self-efficacy has changed in terms of dealing with teams, goals, and obstacles (Almutairi, 2020). The table 19 below exhibits the findings of leadership self-efficacy with respect to each belief:

Self-efficacy level	P/ Numbers	Beliefs		Behavior consequences
High self-efficacy	3	Negative Beliefs	Fears	Successfully establishing a new department
			Conflicts	Ability to solve the conflicts
			I am a woman	Managing two sections (men and women) successfully and reducing stereotype that she had
	10	Positive Beliefs	Aspiration	High productivity- Motivations
			Qualification	Growth mindset
			Confidence	Making initiatives -High productivity- Knowledge

Table 19: High leadership self-efficacy.

According to Table 19, their leadership self-efficacy is high, and the reason for that is that they are distinguished as leaders by various characteristics. Regardless of the type of belief they have, they have been able to overcome the negative belief and maintain the positive belief. This led to an impact on their leadership behaviour, such as the ability to establish a new department, success, conflict resolution, overcoming stereotypes, motivation for the team, an open mindset to understand opportunities and dealing with differences, initiative, and higher productivity.

To understand how the negative belief has been overcome, P8 is one of the respondents who deals with it. She had a lot of fears due to the fact that it is a new department, and she is also a new member, so has a lack of knowledge, experience, and ignorance of any new major mission. But she was able to achieve this goal effectively, stating:

I was afraid of how I was going to make it, especially in a new department, and it is not easy. At the beginning, I got tired at work, but after that, the department began to operate by itself; it also had committees in charge of various tasks. I am satisfied that I created a positive teamwork spirit in the department and that it fully operates.

Further, the negative beliefs that P15 has as a result of the stereotype that she is considered a woman running two sections (of both men and women) and expecting to be judged easily. However, she was able to regain her self-confidence as a woman through her awareness of her leadership skills, her prior relationships with her team, and her experience. She said that:

I was not new to the members, I knew a lot of college members and management in the college, so it was easy for me to deal with the current role, and I had a great similarity between my previous and current experience. From sixty to seventy percent there is a great similarity in responsibilities but with the increase in the size of the tasks but in general I know the administration and how the system works at the university.

P19, who has fears due to the tension among her colleagues, can explain her high leadership self-efficacy in terms of her initiatives to run the department despite her fear of conflicts and her ability to solve them:

Praise be to God, we were able to create a cooperative and peaceful environment, and everything is perfect. I was once afraid that it would become stratified; I do not like classes. I tried as much as possible to reduce it because it was one of the problems in the period before it, so I tried as much as possible to withdraw negative energy. Thank God the situation is improving, and this is what reassures me.

On the other hand, this group's positive beliefs contributed to their high leadership self-efficacy performance. The aspirations, deserve, and confidence are the beliefs introduced by participants.

Aspirations to a leadership position are indicated by high leadership self-efficacy (Hagan, 2021; Lartey *et al.*, 2023; Sanchez & Lehnert, 2019). This theme is approved among three participants; in addition, each participant shows high self-efficacy in her role in different ways. As examples:

P5, who stated that she created the initiative to make change in her department and achieve social responsibility with the support of charity organisations. Additionally, leader's ability to change and improve is related to a leader's high self-efficacy (Dwyer, 2019; Machida & Schaubroeck, 2011; Murphy, 2016).

Furthermore, P11, who showed strong beliefs in terms of "deserving" this opportunity. She faced difficulties in her college being the first woman to work in the male section, where there were missing facilities such as a private bathroom, a carpark, etc. However, she showed a high level of understanding for this current situation, which does influence her desire to accept this role. She has high awareness of her role in breaking the stereotype that Saudi women faced in limiting their opportunities in leadership positions. In addition, she confirmed that:

Women should share men in decision-making positions; I believe these facilities are just a matter of time. Once I accept this role, I prepare the future for women to be in a comfortable environment.

She distinguished this by growth mindset, and growth mindset is a high indication of high self-efficacy (Justus *et al.*, 2023; Silbaugh, 2016). A leader with growth mindset believes that talents and skills can be acquired, whereas those with a fixed mindset believe that abilities are inherent and cannot be gained through development. Growth-minded leaders exceed their boundaries, develop new skills, and benefit from opportunities for advancement, allowing them to advance to new levels (Justus *et al.*, 2023; Mohr, 2018; Lartey *et al.*, 2023).

Moreover, confidence as a belief supports women in managing their positions; as an example, P18 was able to conduct research, teaching, and management tasks all together. She comments:

I do not see that administrative work interferes with the productivity of research; on the contrary, I was able to produce research and my tasks were not affected. And I see that the reason depends on the skill of the individual in managing her priorities and organising her goals.

7.8. High leadership self-Efficacy discussions

This is the second section of discussion within this chapter that responds to the second research question. Beliefs that negatively affect their self-efficacy in leadership are presented in the first part of this chapter. Nevertheless, this section will explain how respondents' leadership self-efficacy positively influenced by their beliefs.

Self-efficacy in leadership can be defined as the element that appears in the behaviour of leaders as a result of their beliefs, experiences, and the types of their work environments, and this element (self-efficacy) may appear weak or strong in their performance (Bandura, 1997; Shirey, 2020; Al-Qahtani *et al.*, 2021). However, this chapter focuses on one factor, which is beliefs in terms of how respondents see their leadership positions both before and during running them, and then how these impacts upon their behaviour.

The findings of this study show that the participants' self-efficacy beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy. Therefore, this section is going to discuss in depth the second type of belief that is related to high self-efficacy.

In this section, the findings are related to thirteen participants out of eighteen. Three of them had low beliefs, while the other ten participants had high beliefs. However, both beliefs lead to high leadership self-efficacy. Low beliefs are reflected by a variety of thoughts, including concerns, workplace tensions, and stereotypes. To understand how negative beliefs do not impact their self-efficacy negatively, this study will critically explain each belief. Firstly, the fears and concerns for establishing and managing where everyone has the same experience and the same environment. Hampton's (2013) study investigated leaders' worries about the unknown, due to a lack of expertise and understanding or being confused with it. It confirmed that when leaders can understand their fears, it enhances their efficacy (Wisse *et al.*, 2019; Solansky *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, when participants started procedures to build the department, this helped her to find out

about her unnecessary fears. In addition, it assured that fears can be positive or negative, depending on how you respond to them and deal with them (Solansky *et al.*, 2023; Hampton, 2013). Positive responding to the concerns, and support transferring them to realistic solutions helps to enhance leadership self-efficacy.

Secondly, an environment that is full tensions and team conflicts can be challenging for one's leadership self-efficacy. The divisions and problems among the staff were the cause of hesitation and fear for another respondent that she might not succeed in managing the department. However, taking the step towards one of her fears and finding solutions indicates high leadership self-efficacy (Javed *et al.*, 2021; Zaman *et al.*, 2021). However, the positive and unexpected change in the environment offered a golden opportunity in terms of empowering Saudi women, which also reveals a new concern. The position was for men only and change allows equality in terms of full authority for women. Nevertheless, this led her to face the inner fears inside herself due to the stereotype of being a woman. Although she is the one who showed interest in this role, her inner fears were raised after being promoted. According to Wilkinson and Rose (2022), women who start working in a male dominant culture are likely to feel less confident at the beginning. Additionally, one of the threats that women face in leadership and that may hinder them from promoting themselves, is the restriction of women in leadership behaviour, where rigour and fast decision-making are expected to be masculine and not female, which restricts their performance due to judgements and stereotypes (Fisk & Overton, 2019; Campuzano, 2019). In addition, it is asserted that women's failure in leadership roles pays a high price for it compared to men due to gender biases and stereotypes, and this affects their beliefs and ambitions (Fisk & Overton, 2019). Saudi studies were nearly the same, where it was found that a gender-segregated environment has male dominance (Parveen, 2022; Alotaibi, 2020). This increases the possibility of women feeling stereotyped and afraid of being judged (Campuzano, 2019; Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

This study aims to discover, in balance, both negative and positive beliefs for Saudi academic women who participate in this study. It is significant to investigate what kind of beliefs they have that support them positively. As a woman from Saudi Arabia and part of this culture, I consider it crucial to gain a deeper understanding of the abilities that can

support the transformations outlined in Vision 2030. Consequently, just as examining the obstacles aids in resolving issues pertaining to the rights of Saudi women, it is crucial to examine their strengths in order to remain progressive and comprehend their contributions.

Thus, on this part, will illustrate the positive beliefs that contribute to building women's leadership self-efficacy. The findings indicate that aspirations, confidence, and qualifications were the positive beliefs that enhanced their leadership self-efficacy. Aspirations are a positive belief mindset that was shown by four participants. According to their responses, they agreed that their prior experiences built their aspirations. Sanchez & Lehnert (2019) confirmed that there is a linked relationship between experience and the level of a person's aspirations. Moreover, they found that negative work experiences affect women's leadership aspirations. Competent women with more negative experience have fewer aspirations to promote themselves again compared to women with less experience. Nevertheless, it was found that they perceived their experience positively, which motivated their aspirations. Furthermore, high aspirations can also be explained in terms of their high leadership self-efficacy (Lartey *et al.*, 2023; Fritz & Van Knippenberg, 2018).

The second positive belief was "qualification". This is tangible evidence to promote women, as argued widely by several studies (Bauer, 2020; Eagly & Carli, 2018; Rhode, 2017). These studies show how women are underrepresented due to their qualifications in leadership roles or that institutions are expecting women to be better qualified to get into a leadership role compared to men. Additionally, the Saudi context has been presented as one of the challenges, as women do not believe they are qualified enough (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Abalkhail, 2017; Alharbi, 2022). However, in this study, P11 believed that being a PhD holder is an adequate and perfect reason to be nominated for numerous leadership opportunities in her academic environment. This high belief has positive reflections on how she perceives the rich opportunities around her. It was confirmed by Bandura (1999) that leaders with high leadership self-efficacy considered change as an opportunity, as well as showing high optimism in how to perceive the future (Mohr, 2018; Murphy, 2016; Dwyer, 2019). Furthermore, P11 related her role by being able to make

achievements, which is an indication of high self-efficacy, to how to perceive her ability to influence and change (Lartey *et al.*, 2023; Wallin *et al.*, 2022; Shirey, 2020). Additionally, Al-Qahtani *et al.* (2021) found in their study, which contained a sample of Saudi women working in academia, finding that women who hold PhDs have higher self-efficacy than women with bachelor's degrees due to their level of qualifications.

Moreover, confidence is a belief shown by four participants in this thesis. It was stated that confidence is related to high self-efficacy (Paglis, 2010; Hannah *et al.*, 2008; Hoyt, 2013). However, the findings of this study found that confidence does not necessarily reflect high leadership self-efficacy; it was asserted in the earlier discussion how high confidence does not always lead to high leadership self-efficacy. Nevertheless, confidence in the second group of this chapter's discussion is built on a strong and positive belief that participants master leadership competencies. Acquisition of confidence for the second group was due to different reasons, such as experience, positive self-imagination, self-initiative, trust of colleagues, and high leadership. According to Fransen *et al.* (2016), leaders' confidence positively affects team performance and enhances the quality of work outcomes. In addition, confidence is directly related to high leadership self-efficacy, which means a confident leader is able to motivate her team (Dwyer, 2019; Paglis & Green, 2002).

The difference between high confidence and low leadership self-efficacy is the source of confidence. Leaders with high confidence and low self-efficacy have confidence related to their individual achievements, which is experience out of leadership experience. Whereas leaders with high confidence and high leadership self-efficacy are derived from their successful experience and high understanding of leadership roles, for example, P9, who has experience in leadership roles, gains confidence from her work outcomes, where she and higher leadership were able to judge her behaviour positively. Positive responses to one's behaviour increase self-efficacy (Dwyer, 2019). Moreover, confidence in P18 was shown by her passion towards leadership and management roles, where her self-imagination supported her to take implied leadership initiatives in the real world and run different positions. Confidence in this section plays a significant role in constructing high leadership self-efficacy.

To summarise, the negative and positive beliefs represented by the thirteen participants enhanced their self-efficacy positively. The negative beliefs are discussed by Eibl *et al.* (2020), who stated that women have fewer self-efficacy beliefs compared to men due to the social context and male dominance in the workplace (Boatwright, 2022). However, the findings of this study explored whether women have positive *and* negative beliefs. The unsupportive beliefs are symbolised by fears, being a woman, and high work tensions. Whereas supportive beliefs are confidence, aspirations, and qualifications. Both kinds of belief have a positive influence on their leadership self-efficacy. There are several studies that present women's beliefs in leadership (Eibl *et al.*, 2020; Machida and Schaubroeck, 2011; Campuzano, 2019; Gipson *et al.*, 2017; Boatwright, 2022). The majority of the studies focused on gender roles in influencing women's beliefs, such as stereotypes and discrimination that impacts women's aspirations and confidence. Stereotyping is a belief revealed by one of the participants, as it has been discussed earlier, but being empowered and having experience in male dominance culture supports women to face and overcome this fear (Hartman & Barber, 2020). Aspirations and confidence have been argued together as women's beliefs that support or prevent the advancement of women in leadership roles. High confidence enhances aspirations, and women with low confidence passively influence their efficacy and aspirations (Boatwright, 2022; Fritz and Van Knippenberg, 2018; Alqahtani, 2021). Aspirations as a belief aligned with the findings of this study, as it was observed that four participants were motivated by this belief. Meanwhile, high confidence is classified in terms of its impact on leadership self-efficacy into positive and negative effects. Even though Bandura (2001) stated that self-confidence enhances self-efficacy (Paglis, 2010), in this study, being a leader is not just about having confidence - especially if this confidence is not combined with leadership competencies.

Furthermore, beliefs in the Saudi context have been addressed in terms of work and social culture impact and personal barriers (Alotaibi, 2020; Al-Qahtani *et al.*, 2021; Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Abalkhail, 2017; Alharbi, 2022). Saudi culture is patriarchal in terms of how women are perceived, for example, as more emotional, weak, and in need of support. This helps to increase the stereotype; and this belief will also be discussed in depth in the fourth chapter under the organisational factor. Moreover, the level of self-confidence has

been argued in terms of Saudi women's empowerment, where the Higher Education fields were dominated by men. According to studies, this hinders women from acquiring leadership skills and impacts their self-efficacy (Al-Qahtani *et al.*, 2021; Alotaibi, 2020).

Although this study is qualitative and the results cannot be generalised, it is important to explore how positive beliefs have reinforced these Saudi women's empowerment under the current changes of Vision 2030 (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). Vision 2030 is presented in the literature review and aims to transfer women's status. The findings of this study illustrated above, show how some belief promotes women's self-efficacy. Dealing with changes required high leadership self-efficacy where unexpected difficulties needed to be solved. For this reason, this study recommends conducting further studies that can explain how certain beliefs support Saudi women's behaviour in new leadership positions related to Vision 2030 developments. Additionally, research should discuss the types of leadership competencies they gain during this change.

7.9. Conclusion

This chapter has provided and discussed the findings, addressing the second research question: *How do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?* According to the findings, women in this study had both high and low leadership self-efficacy. Their beliefs, however, do not necessarily play an important role in developing their leadership self-efficacy. Lack or provision of training, experience, and knowledge has resulted in low or high leadership self-efficacy. Leadership self-efficacy is not only about the leader's beliefs but also about being able to comprehend and put into practice leadership competencies. Leadership capacities have been discussed in the discussions and literature reviews. Furthermore, as this chapter explored participants' beliefs, the following chapter will investigate the external factor that impacts participants' leadership behaviour, that of organisations.

Chapter 8: Organizations and leadership styles

8. Introduction

This is the last chapter that presents findings and discussion about the organization's types (responsive, unresponsive, and semi-responsive) that Saudi women academic leaders perceived and how that influenced their leadership style. These findings were derived from the interview responses of women academics who hold positions as head departments and deans. This study, as previously mentioned, covered four governmental universities in Riyadh: two are gender-segregated buildings, one is a mixed university, and one is only for women (one gender). All of those interviewed were associated with Saudi higher education institutions, which all follow the same public sector process in terms of employees' promotion, funding, and salaries in Saudi Arabia. But they are not the same on the other side of work culture. The semi-structured interviews were conducted on the basis of participant gender as well as leadership experience. However, the respondents were further categorised based on personality and understanding of leadership variables, identifying particular characteristics that notably distinguish them in the workplace.

The data were thematically analysed, as described in the methodology chapter. This chapter explains the findings' themes and discusses them. In the beginning, it discusses the key characteristics between each organizational culture (responsive, unresponsive, and semi-responsive) that distinguishes from one another. Second, it explores and reflects on how their leadership styles are influenced by their organisation's form.

The main purpose for this chapter is to critically examine the organizations' type of Saudi women leaders in academia and identifying the leadership style they follow in each type. Therefore, this chapter's presentation will be presenting two main themes related: organizational culture and leadership style. Each main theme will include mini themes and the discussions under each section.

RQ3: How do the environmental work types (responsiveness, unresponsiveness, and semi-responsiveness) influence Saudi academic women's leaders' leadership styles?

This, the last research question aimed to understand their workplace and how this influences the adoptions of leadership style. My empirical research has identified the sources of self-efficacy in the environment of Saudi women academics' leaders in the first chapter and how that promoted or hindered their self-efficacy. Nevertheless, that led me, informed by the theory and research, to seek to understand how the environment according to this study's theoretical framework that mentioned earlier as factor influence the leadership style. I investigate organisational culture through the lens of the participants. Then, my research will investigate the ways in which this culture impacts the adoption of particular leadership styles by the participants. Therefore, I contend that the most effective approach to presenting this qualitative data is to partition it into two primary sections—analysis and discussion—for each of the factors in order to provide comprehensive insights into both aspects and the influence of origin types on leadership styles. Consequently, this section presents the following points: (a) organisational culture analysis and discussion (b) Analysis and discussion of leadership styles.

8.1. Organisational culture

Many scholars have studied the culture of the organization, highlighting its significant impact on individuals and leaders (Warrick, 2017; Ozcan et al., 2014). Moreover, among academicians and practitioners, the notion of organisational culture has been the subject of extensive discussion. Some academics take a more reductionist approach, seeing company culture as just another component that affects productivity that can be studied and changed in order to get the results one wants. As an alternative, there are scholars who take an anthropological stance, viewing organisational culture as a metaphor for the more abstract and intangible symbolic elements of life in organisations. In spite of these different ways of thinking, most of the management literature holds that culture is best viewed as a complex organisational variable that can be studied, recognised, and connected to different factors (Whelan, 2016; Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020).

Organizational Culture is also defined by Meng & Berger (2019) as a set of beliefs, values, and ideas that create connections and feelings and affect the level of cooperation and performance of individuals. This study also takes into account this definition to comprehend the perceptions, emotions, and connections Saudi women have with their

respective departments and colleges. The influential culture was divided into three types (responsive, unresponsive, and semi-responsive), and this division is based on the theory of self-efficacy that was put forward in the theoretical framework of the study and based on the analysis data. Leadership Self-efficacy is the performance resulting from a leader's beliefs, experience, and interaction with the organisation, and organisation is a vital factor that, in return, influences leaders' self-efficacy (Skaalvik, 2020).

Not all organisations back their leaders as they manage, grow teams, and solve problems (Whelan, 2016). Even if a leader has a high level of leadership self-efficacy, the organisation may limit their ability to function effectively (Shirey, 2020). As this study focuses on understanding the leadership for Saudi women, it is hard to get a whole picture of women in leadership roles without understanding how they perceive their organizational role toward their work goals, realistic plans, strategies and creativity. And how they understood it, how they articulated it, and how that affected their ambition and performance.

Therefore, this research question was initiated to understand the organization from the participants' perspectives and then how the academic leaders interacted with it in terms of the leadership style used.

Moreover, this study identified the meaning of the three types in terms of its' responsiveness: responsive, non-responsive, and semi-responsive related to the participants' perspective, see below:

- **Responsive environment:** Is the workplace that characterized by leaders can manage, change, and influence their team and work. In addition, it has less issues comparing by other types (nonresponsive and semi-responsive) and friendly atmosphere. Leaders at this type of organisation are willing to promote themselves again to leadership positions.
- **Nonresponsive:** Is the environment where leaders face high challenges in terms of team responses, work policies, and high load work that barrier them from conducting the plans they aim for. Additionally, either the leaders or their team feel frustrated and exhausted due to the work atmosphere and system.
- **Semi-responsive:** Is related to the workplace where the leaders face challenges but still see the other positive side, such as the atmosphere or some changes that she could implement.

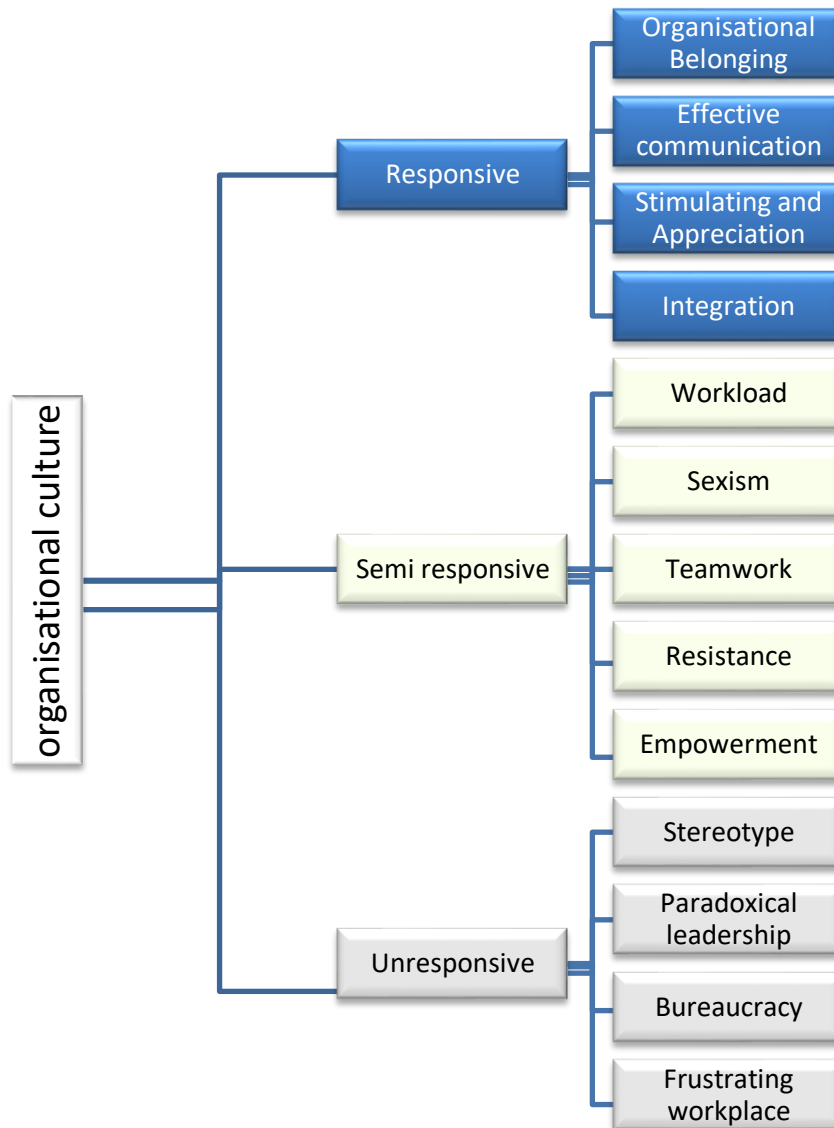


Figure 6: Organisational culture types.

Source: Researcher's own construction

Figure 6 provides a summary of the divisions within each type of organization and the presentation of each characteristic. The first type is the responsive environment, which is considered the most positive environment. The organisational culture of this type distinguishes itself by fostering a sense of homeliness and high appreciation among participants. Additionally, this type exhibits positive aspects such as effective communication and equitable integration between the two genders.

Conversely, semi-responsive organisations encounter a combination of advantages and obstacles. The obstacles that semi-responsive organisations encounter are resistance, load, and gender discrimination. In their environment, the women's empowerment and collaboration were supportive elements.

The final selection featured in the diagram is the unresponsive type. It presents the participants with the greatest difficulty and complexity. This work culture is characterised by prevalent stereotypes among women, leading to frustration, bureaucracy, and paradoxical leadership.

The next table classified the number of participants' who belong to different universities' structures in terms of their level of responsiveness.

Organisations' structure	Participants' numbers	Responsive	Unresponsive	Semi-responsive
Gender-segregated A	5	1	2	2
Gender-segregated B	4	2	1	1
Mixed	3	2	---	1
Women only	6	2	3	1
Total number	18	7	6	5

Table 20: Participants number in each type of organisation.

According to table 20, seven of the participants perceived their environment as responsive, while the semi-responsive and unresponsive were 5 and 6, respectively. In the next paragraphs, the explanation will be presented and discussed.

8.2. The responsive environment

A responsive environment has been described by seven participants out of eighteen in this study. According to the theoretical framework of this study responsive environment offers flexibility and positivity to individual to develop and contribute to changes (Bal & Izak, 2021).

Furthermore, Chmura (2016) has described what responsive and positive organisational cultures look like. He stated it consists of four groupings of principles that indicate a positive approach to employee performance: truthfulness, helping others, and justice are examples of happiness. Additionally, the pursuit of excellence in attributes like responsibility, commitment, and dependability is crucial. Flexibility and openness, as well as positive and creative energies, are essential. Lastly, positive emotions like devotion and teamwork are crucial. Also, in this study it has been defined regards to participants responses as a warm atmosphere in which leaders can easily influence and develop the team and work. It is an inspiring attractive workplace, not a repulsive one.

Findings:

➤ **Organisational Belonging**

This theme is related to the sample who belong to the category of the respondent's work environment, as it is characterized by cooperation, closeness, and harmony between the members of the work so that they feel that it is their home. The seven respondents saw the general work atmosphere according to their descriptions as being one family and high cooperation as teams.

In particular, P5 said they are a team like one family:

Workplace for me like home, as well as we have one group on WhatsApp, including the president of the university, and it's a social group not to work to congratulate, support, and know the updates about each other.

Additionally, P5 confirmed in her talk that a lot of positive changes started after appointing a woman as president. Role modelling is important in enhancing women's leadership image in her organizational culture (Campuzano, 2019). Role model has been discussed in this first discussion's chapter.

A similar perspective was voiced by P8 who said that there is a deep understanding in her teamwork:

It is a comfortable and a developed workplace, and I feel of harmonies among the teams, where we understand and support each other easily.

In her statement she referred to the homogeneity that is one of the benefits that facilitates easy comprehension of each other's communication, interpretation, and response (Campuzano, 2019).

➤ **Effective communication and teamwork**

Five participants stated that excellent communication is the one of the primary components that enhances the level of responsiveness in their environment. On the other hand, the lack of teamwork will be illustrated later on in this chapter, and how it was challenging at the semi responsive environment. It emphasised that communication contributes to improve workplace cooperation, positive relationship and achieve work goals. It enables one to improve the efficiency and quality of job output (Yue et al., 2023). As an example, for communication, P13 confirmed that:

The communication at the university is excellent. I mean, in terms of ease of communication between all parties of the university, we have a communication system that makes it possible for any student or faculty member to communicate easily and express any problem they face, and there is ease even in direct communication with the president of the university. I mean, we communicate with us at a very high level.

P5 added that communication in her workplace is characterised by organised and professional, there is a system by human resource function to follow up emails' responses.

Professionalism in communication is one of the criteria we have at work at the university, we do not communicate via WhatsApp and mobile, but by e-mail, and there is a specific time criterion for the response, so the response must be within 24 hours, either with the appropriate response or apology. Any delay in responding to e-mails is escalated to human resources, and this happens rarely. At the university, we do not suffer from lack or delay in replying or any problems in communication, and I think that this is very important for the continuation of work.

P15 explained that communication is a fundamental aspect of collaboration within her environment, stating:

I am surrounded by a highly collaborative group of individuals with whom I have excellent rapport and in which communication is exceptionally efficient.

In this type of environment, communication has a beneficial impact on the team's productivity, collaboration, and clarity of the work process. Effective communication in the workplace fosters positive relationships, which in turn elevates the level of positivity in the workplace (Specchia et al., 2021).

➤ **Stimulating and appreciation:**

Four participants regarded their workplace as responsive due to the appreciation they received from their colleagues and higher-level management. Stimulating can be inner and outer, inside the college itself or by the free services for academic members. For example, P17 confirmed that the general atmosphere in her workplace is stimulating inside the college. She stated that:

The work environment at the institution is really motivating, yet there is some stagnation from time to time like in everyday life, there are setbacks that lead to impair enthusiasm for work. However, the work environment at the university always encouraging, such as a ceremony to award exceptional students and distinguished members, provides a lot of benefits despite some downsides because this is the nature of life.

Furthermore, P18 stated that appreciation that she received from her colleagues, team, supervisors and being valued for her input is one of the advantages in her environmental atmosphere:

Personally, I perceive a positive working atmosphere. To be honest, there is a high regard for talents, experience, and individuals; in fact, I perceive it as a comfortable work climate with high appreciation, and I feel valued by everyone as a hardworking and experienced individual.

On the other hand, P12 did not take into account the motivation related to the work atmosphere itself, but the facilities and benefits provided by the work for the family's stability, such as a free house, good schools for her children, and living in a beautiful area with all the services.

Working at the university is very comfortable; for example, the advantages, housing, and services contribute to the comfort of the place, and the children's schools are good, which is, in my opinion, a requirement for any member who wishes to work in the academia sector.

The participants experienced a work culture that was both motivating and encouraging. The motivational sources were different. The organization's atmosphere, exemplified by ceremonies and honors for distinguished academics, and the values of teamwork that foster a sense of appreciation, served as an internal motivator. Additionally, the participant's family was incentivized by resources outside the organisation, such as the university's housing and the children's schools.

➤ **Gender Competence (Integration):**

As this study focuses on Saudi women's leadership in higher education, sexism as a theme and challenge has been discussed in several studies (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Alotaibi, 2020; Al-Qahtani *et al.*, 2021). It is considered as one of the threats for women's leadership career progressions due to different factors such as organisational structure in gender segregated universities. However, this study as it has been mentioned investigated four universities with different structures (gender-segregated, women only, mixed). In all three types of environments (responsive, unresponsive, semi responsive) this theme (Genderism) has been presented in different ways. In the responsive environment participants expressed that they do not find any differences between the two genders in their workplace in terms of promotion, authorities, and abilities. However, this theme will be illustrated more in the other environment's types later.

P5 stated that she did not find any differences in her workplace between women and men. Both of them applied for the same opportunities and should meet the same criteria, and only knowledge and experience make one more qualified, not the type of gender at all.

There are criteria that have been set by human resources for all staff, regardless of gender, to get promotions and enter competitions for positions such as head of department, etc. I never felt from my colleagues or in my work any differences in our department meetings and exchanging our opinions.

P5 in her statement confirmed that her organisation's policy and procedures is a part of enhancing competence and diminished the sexism. Nevertheless, P15 who worked in gender-segregated environment where women have the opportunity for the first time to lead both sections (men and women). Her organisation decided to overcome the sexism

in authorities and give equal rights for both of them. She was able to get this opportunity and manage both sections but her opinions about sexism had changed. She was perceiving that women are the same as men in terms of work. P15 stated that there are differences between men and women in performance in her department by saying that:

Men are more flexible and have a goal to get the work done, and there are no differences between them like this is my job or this is not my job but so-and-so. They have high levels of collaboration, and they are able to do each other's work as a team. I mean, really, teamwork was more important for men. To be honest, on the men's part, I noticed that they are faster in achieving task and more flexible. In the women's section, discipline and accuracy ensure that the tasks are carried out in a precise and neat manner.

Despite the fact that P15 is empowered in her department, the stereotype against women is still being perpetuated by her reference to the distinctions between men and women in terms of their sex. She characterised the men team as more adaptable and efficient, whereas the women team possesses a high level of accuracy, which may restrict the workflow. These biases have the potential to limit the chances for marginalised groups to succeed and achieve their maximum potential in organisations and society, as well as to have a detrimental influence on people's personal and professional lives (Huang, 2020).

Whereas in women only responsive workplace described that one of the advantages in their workplace is being only women. That according to them make them feel more comfortable and provide women with full empowerment in high level positions.

I am very comfortable that my workplace is for only women; it is easy to communicate with them, and you feel of their support. Additionally, being a university fully run by women makes me feel proud as a woman.

It is significant to find out how gender competence can enhance the responsiveness in the workplace and influenced their organisational culture. In addition, Chang & Milkman (2020) discussed the harm of stereotyping towards women in the workplace and solutions' strategies. They emphasised that supporting gender diversity and removing biases has many benefits for organisations, as they benefit from female competencies and talents.

In summary, out of the total of eighteen participants in this study, seven of them characterised their workplace as responsive. In the responsive environment, the three main themes that emerged from the participants' descriptions were stimulation, integration, and collaboration. As a result, they perceived it to be comparable to the atmosphere in which they experienced a sense of belonging. Thus, this study considers the environment to be favorable and has a positive atmosphere. However, not every participant in this study consistently experienced a positive and stimulating work environment. The semi-responsive findings will be presented in the following section.

8.3. The semi responsive environment

A semi-responsive environment is the second type of organisational culture in this study, which I classified according to participants' views. There are five participants out of eighteen who described their environment in between, not an unresponsive nor a responsive one. The semi responsive environment can be defined in this study as a workplace where the leaders face challenges but still see the other positive side, such as the atmosphere or some changes that she could implement. I analyzed the replies' participants and found that the semi-responsive participants showed a desire to maintain their positions at their university. In spite of encountering obstacles, they either successfully resolved them or incorporated them into their work. For example: high workload, teamwork, empowerment, resistance, sexism. Consequently, I categorised this particular organisation as semi-responsive. Further information regarding the challenges and advantages of coding in this particular sort of organisation will be provided in the detailed explanation below.

➤ Workload

Workload has been characterised as several mental duties that might cause anxiety and excessive stress in an employee. This stress and workload might cause uncertainty and conflicts in one's work. Furthermore, it is one of the reasons why people quit or change jobs (Anees, *et al.*, 2021; Barpanda & Saraswathy, 2023). Three participants face workload, which is one of the themes that the participants face in the semi-responsive environment. According to P9, work pressure is augmented by a lack of appreciation by the organisation. P9 comments that:

We are responsible for the quality of the college, and it is a high workload that requests specific programs to apply quality, high concentration, long hours on the computers, following up all the departments' activities and we should be sure of various details; however, as a department, we still do not feel our efforts are appreciated as it should be, especially since we are conducting the hardest tasks in the college.

Furthermore, another participant P7 compared her career and leadership role to one that exists just to solve endless problems in her department, which hinders her from participating in research and academic achievements:

Before I worked as a department chair, I was only responsible for my personal duties as a lecturer, and I did not have to be on campus every day. Now I have to come every day, and I am responsible for all the faculty-related problems and student problems. All of this high pressure at work prevents me from doing research and participating in conferences, so all my time is spending trying to solve problems more than anything else.

Additionally, P20 experiences the same impacts of demands that P7 previously mentioned, P20 said:

Research publishing cannot be considered one of my duties or tasks; yes, I am a dean, but I have no time to start research and publication. Publishing necessitates a stress-free mind, which is impossible when juggling administrative work. In addition, the weekend does not count because of the interspersed work connections. And I think that in this position there is no choice but to accept and live with pressure.

Workload was one aspect that participants in the semi-environment faced. A lack of appreciation can lead participants to perceive their workload as more challenging. Additionally, it negatively impacts their ability to balance their duties effectively because they cannot participate in the research field.

➤ **Sexism**

Sexism is a challenge that was evident in semi responsive environment by one participant among five. Furthermore, this challenge has been raised and discussed by several Saudi scholars as one of the barriers for Saudi women in academic leadership roles (Al-Qahtani

et al., 2021; Alotaibi, 2020). It is significant to focus on comparing between the other organisation's types (responsive and unresponsive). Additionally, this study is qualitative and does not aim to generalise sexism as one of the organisational culture characters in the semi responsive. But it is important to explore how the participants face it here and may still not consider her workplace unresponsive. It has been presented above that the responsive workplace is distinguished by equal competence between two genders. Also, through the unresponsive one, I will discuss how the stereotype was one of the factors they have in their organisations. The sexism is a challenge faced by P10 who worked as a dean, she stated that it was difficult for some of the men in her department to accept her because she is a woman, and they are not used to getting orders by a woman. P10 stated that:

Unfortunately, I had a fundamental problem: I had male employees who were excellent and good at everything, but they had a problem. How can a woman lead them? I found myself in front of them in a cold war. There was a resistance from them—from certain people, of course—and it's a problem of how we were headed by a woman, and they weren't happy about my decisions.

Moreover, the conflicts due to the sexism had created high tensions that led P10 to fire the man who in her opinion was the reason for that. Although she suffered from the sexism, she prefers working with men over women in general. She justified her opinion by saying that men have historical experience in leadership compared to women. Therefore, she finds that men can make quick decisions while women have high hesitation. This can be explained by why she considered her environment semi-responsive, because in some way she inside herself justified men's preference for leadership positions. This view, which maintains that males are inherently more capable of taking the lead, stems from antiquated gender stereotypes. The preference for male leaders is influenced by the absence of visible female role models in authority positions and male-dominated structures (Huang, 2020; Savigny, 2014).

➤ **Teamwork**

Teamwork is vital in organisations because it increases responsiveness in the workplace culture. It is proven that the efficacy of teamwork contributes to increased productivity and

job satisfaction and minimising conflicts and exhaustion (Copeland, 2021; Wildman et al., 2021). The teamwork theme in the semi-responsive environment takes different levels, from being effective or varying depending on employees' personalities to the level of being "moody" or "absent" in their organisations.

P9 in her statement represents the high level of teamwork effectiveness. She confirmed that one of the secrets for successful work outcomes in her department is the teamwork power. She said that:

We, as a quality department in the college, what distinguishes us is that we are one team and team spirit, although the tasks are difficult, but we work for long working hours even after work. In addition, we support each other and also be in the back of each other (support), without my team it will be harder it deals with the high pressure.

Meanwhile, P20 said the performance and cooperation of the team is varied and depends on the personality of the employee who is in charge in her department:

Teamwork, you cannot get it completely, and sometimes it depends more on the personality of the employee than on the team in general. For example, some tasks I have to follow after working hours for some work considerations, if the employee is cooperative, I will get a response but if not, you cannot do anything. Even if it is sometimes an urgent matter.

Conversely, another participant P14 considered that teamwork is challenging in her department, however she justified that because she is new member in her college. She stated that:

I am a head department; I cannot make decisions without the committee's approval. Unfortunately, some members make decisions based on their personal benefits and their moods, which mostly affect the work's effectiveness. Additionally, I just notice absence of a teamwork culture, that even when they are working as a group, you cannot fully depend on them.

Studies suggest that teamwork enhances job satisfaction (Wildman et al., 2021). However, in this group, two participants viewed teamwork as a crucial factor that enables them to successfully pursue their goals, and without it, the environment could become less responsive. However, the other participants perceived

teamwork differently and depended more on the individual who was in charge, which means it can be challenging or supportive.

➤ **Resistance**

Resistance has been mentioned as one of the challenges that leaders may confront in the workplace. Two out of five participants have shown it to be a challenge in this type of environment. Scholars argue that there is both positive and negative resistance (Malhotra et al., 2021; Darmawan and Azizah, 2020). The positive aspect of work resistance is that it can assist in identifying possible problems, improving the change process, and providing essential feedback (Darmawan and Azizah, 2020). Nevertheless, if not effectively controlled, resistance can emerge as a substantial obstacle to change. Various factors, such as uncertainty, distrust in leaders, perceived job security risks, and the preference for maintaining the current state of affairs, can influence resistance (Hon et al., 2014). It arises when leaders make changes that contradict the rationality of their followers (Malhotra et al., 2021). However, according to its findings, this study focuses on negative resistance.

Resistance in the workplace to P10 has been interrupted by confidence issues between followers and her:

Because I am woman leading them, they do not trust me. Usually, they have a reason to not follow what I am saying.

Part of what P10 faces is due to the sexism of women's image in leadership that was presented earlier.

Further, the resistance was part of the P14 journey in managing her department, she believed that because she is new employee in her college. When she made any suggestion, it received by rejection, however she said she was able to deal with it:

I am managing the department for almost six months; it was hard to get their acceptance in my first three months. There was resistance to the change; it is not easy to suggest new things, and I am not sure why, but I think because I am a new member. However, the water is moving now, and I guess it was a matter of time to build relationship with them.

Resistance has been identified as a barrier in the semi-environment. The initial form was a result of gender discrimination, and the boss has terminated one of the employees in order to address the issue. In the second type of resistance, followers do not trust the leader because she is new, even though the leader uses this tactic to ensure her followers accept her without a hitch.

➤ **Empowerment**

Empowerment for Saudi women was one of the target goals of Vision 2030 (Alotaibi, 2020). In the higher education field, women have been promoted to positions which were previously only for men as it has been mentioned earlier in this thesis. In this study, there are participants who are being empowered or surrounded by a new image for women's empowerment. Especially in this section, most participants expressed how empowering women in their university has a positive impact in terms of equity and support.

P9 expressed her relief and happiness of seeing the transferring of women's position from unempowered to the empowering, and how that influences the stereotype and culture:

Previously, the leadership positions' opportunities were limited to men, whether they had competence or not, once he was a man. Now the topic has completely changed, and the opportunity for both sexes has become. An example that today a woman is an agent of the college and leads a team of a man and a woman. And the wonderful thing about this matter is that the discussion about the possibility of women leading or having the ability to lead is over by men; it has become a system and imposed, and women today modify their status in many areas, so the culture has changed, and the situation has become very comfortable compared to before.

It has been confirmed that the limited leadership positions for women in higher education has a negative impact in terms of authority independence (Alotaibi, 2020; Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Al-Qahtani *et al.*, 2021). For example, men decided that what works for them in male sections then contradicted with the female sections' goals. Therefore, P7 considered herself as a lucky because her direct boss is a woman compared to her previous colleagues who worked as heads of department and were managed by men.

I am very fortunate that the dean and vice dean of the college are women, and this is something that has made it easier for me to do a lot of tasks now

compared to my previous colleagues. The dean was the head of the department and knows the dilemmas and problems that women go through in managing departments. Her presence is honestly supportive, and many of the problems that were in the past I do not face today, so I consider the presence of a woman who understands what the women's section can face very important.

Increasing women's images in leadership positions has a positive impact on the work atmosphere. Compared to the past, it supports women's aspirations, strengthens the sense of equal authority, and gives heads of departments and deans a sense of hearing and understanding from higher leadership.

In summary: Five of the eighteen participants perceived their environment as a combination of positive and negative factors (semi-responsive). The difficulties they face dramatically differ from the unresponsive environments that come after. They effectively addressed challenges by implementing significant resolutions, such as dismissing an employee, or employing small strategies to resolve the problems. The good components of the work environment included collaboration, the advantages of increasing the visibility of women in leadership positions, and some participants themselves being empowered. On the other side, the work environment was characterized by resistance, burden, and sexism. As previously mentioned, they successfully navigated this challenging environment. Regardless of the impact of the decisions they made on employees or the workplace, this study explored their own perceptions of the workplace culture and how leaders found it. This study interrupts their perception of the workplace as semi-responsive; their environment was neither too hard nor too good for them. Additionally, they were ambitious in their employment and wanted to advance to other positions within the university, which is an indication of the environment's level of responsiveness.

8.4. The unresponsive environment

According to the classification I presented earlier in this chapter, the unresponsive environment represents the last type of organization in this study. Participants have reported that leaders in this environment face substantial obstacles in terms of team responses, work regulations, and excessive workloads that impede their ability to execute

their goals. Furthermore, the leaders or their teams are irritated and weary as a result of the work environment and system. Six people out of a total of eighteen experienced significant difficulty in seeing it, which can be attributed to the unresponsive nature of the environment. The following themes of this category that I have discerned from participants are:

➤ **Frustrating workplace**

A frustrating environment is when employees see their workplace as a source of issues that lacks resources to complete their jobs causing anger and frustration (Glaserová, 2019; Ambrose *et al.*, 2002). This theme is polarised with the theme (Organisational Belonging) in the responsive environment. Participants considered the workplace is frustrated is for varied reasons in the unresponsive environment. In particular, P4 found that the transformation and change at her university has a negative impact on the employees and work atmosphere, as this change does not prepare employees for it or meet their abilities:

We were doing great in scientific research and have an abundance in publications. But after new decisions to join the international universities' rank, most of academic staff feel frustrated. It has very tough requirements in terms of quality documents, and other academic tasks. Additionally, these new changes require publishing in certain academic journals with high ranks, and not all of the staff can speak and write in English, which is hard and disappointed to them.

Whereas P11 the frustration in her case was not to the employees' competencies but to the absence of management authority in her position:

The issue is that in the government environment, you cannot make large changes. In addition, you cannot reward or punish a disciplined employee, and so on. This led to a lack of quality and efficiency in the results of the work. So, the only solution I have is a hidden tool: carefully picking and selecting hardworking staff

Lack of social atmosphere is the reason for frustrating work atmosphere. P16 clarified that part of the weak relations is due to the building facilities where it is demotivated to meet colleagues and strengthen the relationship, she commented:

Social life is explicitly dead at the university. Even the environment is not conducive to communication, for example in college, there are no wooded places where you can sit and meet people. Unfortunately, my college has only one cafe and its' service is bad, so it is like you forced to stay the whole day in the office alone in high isolation. Even the members of the department after the meeting leave in a hurry and have no desire for a nice side chat.

A frustrating environment was one of the characteristics that distinguished the unresponsive workplace. This characteristic appears to be particularly challenging for the participant to manage or influence. Because the cause of this characteristic is external and complex, such as a change that requires certain skills that staff cannot meet, a problem-solving mindset, or a lack of social connection. All of these factors influence leaders' perceptions and feelings towards their workplace, as they are unable to significantly alter the environment.

➤ **Bureaucracy**

Bureaucracy is identified as one of the challenges that participants face in the unresponsive environment. In Saudi higher education, it is described as collections of managerial layers that cause delays in the work process (Aburizaizah, 2022)

P4 verified that there is a lot of room for expansion, but the bureaucracy is difficult to deal with:

There are several complexity and procedures that obstruct my capacity to make decisions and dealing with these complexities is tedious and time-consuming. These bureaucratic complications have resulted in a lack of financial incentives and research funding. Unfortunately, growth is possible, but it is stalled.

Another participant has also illustrated the fact that bureaucracy affected progress, even the free initiatives for work was disrupted, P6 said:

There was a company that will provide a free service to college students and support them in growth, but it was requested that their logo be present on the forms submitted to students and on the site. When submitting it to the dean, it was directed to the department council, and then it was raised to the Vice Dean of Graduate Studies. They thought that there were fees, so it was transferred to the Procurement and Finance Department, and the Finance

Department does not know what works with a transaction that does not require fees or sums of money, and each party sends to the other, and the initiative was lost.

In P14's account, it was evident how bureaucracy has an impact on the entire college development and plans:

The ministry is the largest roadblock right now. Unfortunately, as colleges of education, the ministry has had a desire for more than three years to modify the structure and benefit from the faculties of education in various ways, but we have not been allowed to go and advance with our goals, and we do not know what is coming.

The bureaucracy that was once a means of optimising organisational efficiency and standardising processes has now become a significant issue in today's swiftly evolving organisations (Adler and Borys, 1996). Inflexible hierarchical structures and decision-making processes can inhibit creativity, adaptability, innovation, and flexibility (Bal & Izak, 2021). In the workplace, bureaucracy may lead to dissatisfaction, low morale, and poor participation. As a result of specialisation and activity silos, workers may be unable to take on responsibilities that are within their skill sets, resulting in inefficient human resource use (Raub, 2008). The participants viewed their environment as hard and tough to alter due to the numerous negative aspects of bureaucracy, which is why I classed it as an unresponsive workplace.

➤ **Paradoxical leadership**

Paradoxical leadership happens when leaders try to satisfy both organizations and individuals. They are not diametrically opposing, but it in two different ways. This strategy, on the other hand, may increase complexity (Julmi, 2021). The findings this study explored found that an unresponsive workplace is marked by contradictory leadership, whereas a responsive workplace is distinguished by effective and professional communication that facilitates task completion. Additionally, this theme is related with a frustrating workplace in terms of increasing the issues and complexity in the university.

P19 described the high pressure she faced due to paradoxical leadership expectations make her exhausted. She said that:

I started planning with colleagues for a goal, and suddenly decision had been made to cancel everything and start over with a different and new goal. At first, I was able to deal with these contradictions in decisions, but with the recurrence of contradictions, unfortunately, I have exhausted the time and enthusiasm of my team, and I lack the tools to create enthusiasm and passion for work. There is no longer a desire to work, And I feel like I'm under so much pressure that I cannot do anything anymore.

Research unproductivity is one of the consequences of the paradoxical leadership style. All the participants here had difficulty publishing papers, and some of them could not at all. P6 stated:

You are expected to publish and contribute to the field of study; but they do not provide you with the time, or tools to do so. It has become a huge achievement to be able to publish while maintaining a leadership position, which is both hilarious and disappointing in academia.

When a leader finds herself torn between meeting her team's needs and achieving higher leadership goals, it's known as paradoxical leadership. The main issue is that while the leader may initially be able to handle the demands of multitasking, over time, she may lose her ability to manage, achieve, and motivate, which can lead to burnout among both the team and the leader (Yengkopiong, 2024).

Therefore, the environment distinguished by this type of issue is considered an unresponsive workplace.

➤ **Stereotyping**

Stereotyping is a theme that was evident in an unresponsive environment. As previously said, sexism was one of the semi-responsive issues, whereas gender competence was the responsive one. The distinctions between sexism and stereotypes are as follows: The multifaceted problems of sexism include prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypical views based on gender. Stereotyping assumes one group to be characterised by another, exaggerating the contrasts between groups. Furthermore, biased attitudes refer to certain views about appropriate behavior that result in unfavorable responses to those who deviate from these expectations (Brown and Stone, 2016). In this section, stereotypes were only found among participants who belong to women-only universities but not in the other categories (gender separated and mixed). The findings revealed that participants

who consider it an unresponsive atmosphere are a result of it being governed by one gender (women). P16 made a remark about it:

It is more expected that the environment is more comfortable for a whole woman but to be honest with you as a researcher, women leaders are always difficult. It is always that when it is a purely female environment, the issue will be more difficult, unlike when you are in men who are more flexible. If the work environment is women and men, it can be smoother because women always have accuracy that may reach complexity.

The other participant P21 interpreted the bureaucratic issue that mentioned earlier due to the women only environment. She believed because it is its sole gender (women) that makes the management manner more complicated. She expressed her wishes to work with the other binary gender (men). She believed if the university has more than one gender that can positively influence the efficiency.

Furthermore, P19 stated that having a work atmosphere which included both sexes would promote their integration. It enables women to learn from men and men to learn and grow from women. So, her workplace is just for women, but she would prefer if it were mixed so that there would be more variation in terms of perspectives.

I see that the presence of men and women in the administration complement each other I mean I expect a big part of the problems of the administration in our university is feminist, I believed men are more affirmative in implementing their plans and decisions.

One facet of this type of environment that women themselves possess against other women in their workplace is stereotype. They see the environment as full of complexity, details, and low process because it is managed by women. As women are a significant part of their university's structure, this cannot be changed, and it is also part of their growth and promotion, which is why a stereotyped view considers it an unresponsive environment.

In summary, six participants out of 18 described their environment as being hard and difficult to develop. The participants' perceptions of the unresponsive environment revealed a bureaucratic process, paradoxical leadership, and a frustrated work environment. All of the above difficulties are related to the policy, work procedure, and

changes where they have no hand, decision, or influence to change them. Furthermore, the study revealed that women's associations with this type of environment hold a stereotypical view of women's leadership. The group in this environment expresses a desire to change their workplace, yet they feel hopeless due to the complexity of the problems they face.

Following this chapter, the findings for each environment will be discussed in the following section.

8.5. Discussions

The discussion to this part of the research questions sought to investigate how participants regarded their organisations in terms of responsiveness, unresponsiveness, and semi-responsiveness. It is also critical to understand how each type has been interpreted by them and how each environment is supportive or non-supporting to them. Thus, the discussion section will present the elements in each organisation and their corresponding or contradictoriness in the other organisation, to have a deeper understanding of these changes and differences on individuals and how they have influenced their work.

The framework that has been employed in this study is self-efficacy theory, which divides the environment as a vital factor in one's self-efficacy into responsive and unresponsive (Bandura, 1999). The sample for this study covered four universities with different structures (gender-segregated, mixed-women only). However, according to the findings, the university's environment is divided into three categories: responsive, unresponsive, and semi-responsive. As this study is qualitative, each university is accordingly classified by the participants' perspectives. This thesis includes eighteen participants. Seven respondents rated their workplace as responsive, five as semi-responsive, and six as unresponsive.

The participants in the responsive organisation described their environment as home that represented the homogeneous and unity among the teamwork. It is where the difficulties and misunderstanding between team members has no place and is characterised by high and smooth goals achievers. This description in the responsive environment also reflects the good connection and non-vertical relations with higher education. A responsive

organisational culture is the "glue" between individuals and a company that simultaneously encourages positive work performance (Khan *et al.*, 2020). In contrast, the paradoxical leadership was an unresponsive one, where the participants felt exhausted due to the gap between higher leadership and senior leadership positions. The heads of departments and deans in this study represent this level of leadership, following the higher authority in the university, such as the university's president. This paradoxical leadership has a detrimental impact on both the executive leadership and the work team's enthusiasm, reduces the leader's and the team's confidence, and resulting in a loss of desire for achievement and creativity. Having no solution and no way to inspire the workforce has a devastating effect on department heads' confidence in their managerial skills.

Julmi's (2021) research stated that paradoxical leadership has a negative side effect. It can be toxic in the work environment because it creates complexity without solutions to it. In the work environment, subordinates may become victims, as they become responsible for resolving contradictions and may increase toxic practices such as abuse of power which leads to blaming employees for any mistakes, high pressure, and harm to individuals. In addition, it leads to negative consequences for the organisation such as low performance. This type of leadership of the environment affects management where the followers started feeling exhausted and lowers their productivity.

Concerning the semi- responsive, the teamwork theme is raised in various levels, from an effective factor that enhances the environment to the absence of it. Also, it can be in the middle level where it depends on the employee's mindset, abilities and characters. It has been confirmed that collaboration is result of positive interpersonal relationship in the workplace (Anggraeni & Tarmidi, 2021). Meluso (2020) stressed that the lack of communication may create a major misunderstanding in the organisation where individuals tend to understand through past experiences and prejudices that have no connection with reality in the workplace. Additionally, lacking teamwork is related to lack of team's trust and respect and disagreement in ideas and opinions which lead to conflicts and enmity (Anggraeni & Tarmidi, 2021).

Furthermore, the participants in the responsive sector found it stimulating, while it frustrated the environment in an unresponsive one. Whereas, in the semi-responsive sector the image of women's empowerment was the supportive factor. Motivations in the responsive environment are related to the positivity which means the feelings and energy generated within an individual or from outside as an organisation that encourages a person to attain her goals (Sudibjo & Nasution, 2020). The motivations for participants were influenced by being valued by their colleagues and environment, holding ceremonies to thank them, and the job's advantages such as housing. In addition, research by Garcia et al. (2017) has shown that there is a notable connection between positive workplace outcomes and factors such as enthusiasm, effectiveness, adaptability, and positivity.

Contrary to the unresponsive workplace, where the participants found the culture, system, authority, and inconsiderate changes hard to deal with, they considered it frustrating. Change and transformations that does not take the employees' competencies in their considerations as an example of that. Further, lack of governance in the system which put the leader under pressure to deal with the weaknesses resulting from that. Besides, the building facilities contribute to creating weak social and professional relationship. All of that cannot be changed by heads of department or deans and they have to face the consequences resulting from this. Glaserová (2019) has asserted in their study that all this causes frustrations in the workplace, which affects employees' job satisfaction.

On the other hand, women's empowerment was able to raise the level of positivity in the semi-responsive organisation and cultivate a sense of confidence more. Following a time of conflict caused by male dominance, participants experienced a sense of comfort, independence, and support. Women's empowerment creates more balance that supports their ability to make more independent decisions in their department. Campuzano (2019) argued that gender diversity serves to enhance trust in mutual understandings in organisations (Eibl *et al.*, 2020). Further, empowerment in organisation culture, is reported by Çakar & Ertürk (2010) As a stimulating process that improves an individual's sense of trust and control, as well as their confidence in their organisation. This process results in improved self-efficacy and performance. Performance has improved in terms of

effectiveness, sharing of knowledge, and the level of accountability and involvement in decisions. This can explain the implications for empowerment for participants in this type of environment, where it raised the level of the organisation's responsiveness to a semi-responsive level regardless of other issues.

Furthermore, this study finds that participants in each type of environment perceived gender differences positively or negatively. Gender competence is characterised in a responsive environment, whereas gender discrimination is a difficulty in a semi-responsive environment, and stereotypes are understood in an unresponsive environment. The organisational responsive culture offered a place where the participants do not feel or see any differences in terms of promotions and efficiency between two genders. This ensures trust according to Mewes (2014). Additionally, according to a study by Alonso Gallo and Gutiérrez López conducted in 2023, the researchers claimed that gender equality in the workplace is a primary ethical and legal right that influences the culture of an organisation. They further stated that gender equality in organisations entails identical rights and opportunities for both men and women in terms of salary, employment standards, participation, and professional development. This is what participants in responsive environments have pointed out: they have the same level of rights as employees achieve and aspire to in their workplace. Diversity in the workplace has a beneficial effect on the organization's objectives by facilitating the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and support, as well as sharing experiences and skills (Alonso Gallo & Gutiérrez López, 2023).

Sexism was one of the issues faced by a participant in the semi-responsive environment and given that Saudi women's empowerment is a recent change, Sexism may emerge as a consequence of this change, which is why this study chose to address it. According to research, there is no single "right" approach for women to respond to sexist comments at work. How to respond most effectively is conditional on the nature of the crime and the identity of the offender. As they consider the pros and cons of speaking out against the behaviour, targeted women frequently find themselves in a difficult position, torn between the desire to end the discrimination and the fear of reprisal or more marginalisation. Additionally, taking strong action—such as going up against the offender or making a

complaint—can be beneficial but also risky (Powell and Wolfe, 2015; Swim and Hyers, 1999). However, the participant in this study has the full authority to change the team and deal with it. This emphasised the women's empowerment image in the semi- environment is not only an image but also a policy that enhance her. It has been mentioned supporting women who encounter harassment and sexism can be achieved through organisational policies and training programmes (Benya et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, the stereotype concept has been enhanced in the unresponsive unite. The hard and difficult issues were related because higher management is formed of women especially in the women-only environment. It has been observed that stereotypes and biases in male-dominated organisations, often lead women to underestimate their performance, even when their actual performance is identical. Women may start to feel less entitled to promotion chances and downplay their accomplishments as a result of this self-fulfilling prophecy (Keen and Salvatorelli, 2016). These gender disparities in self-assessment and confidence are not driven by actual abilities or performance, but rather by societal stereotypes and implicit biases (Ellemers, 2018). In Saudi society and women-only environment this can be interrupted because of the traditional management perception that associates leadership characteristics with patriarchal society's customs (Campuzano, 2019). It is notable that Saudi society has this attitude and believes that men are typically capable of addressing problems from the ground up (Hakiem, 2022). However, this stereotype mindset can occur unintentionally, where women may reinforce it while limiting chances for other women (Ellemers, 2018; Moskowitz, 2010).

Continuing with the three environment's types, effective communication distinguished the responsive environment. It was not only inside the college but more, it was between the upper leadership and the bottom, which promotes smooth solutions and higher understanding. The communications inside these universities have a professional and systematic process. It confirmed that digitisation of workplace communication improves teamwork and harmony (Marion & Fixson, 2021). On the other side, semi-responsive and unresponsive environments faced bureaucracy, workload, and resistance as obstacles. In the semi-responsive, participants were able to deal with resistance but not with workload. Tension, doubting the change, and blaming it on others are the resistance

attitudes of followers due to the lack of trustworthiness of the leader (Weber *et al.*, 2022). However, with all these behaviours, leaders in the semi-environment were able to deal with them by building trustworthy relationships or by changing team members. That is a side of considering it as (semi) in this study due to leaders' ability to adapt or change with obstacles, whereas bureaucracy was a hurdle that participants in an unresponsive cannot change. Additionally, they cannot implement any small changes due to the long and complicated process that led to lost one participant's initiative as an example.

To sum up, it is significant to understand how organisations can influence women's leadership image, performance, and capabilities. Organisations' challenges, advantages, and atmosphere may enhance or reduce particular difficulties for women, such as stereotypes and sexism. In addition, Saudi women's empowerment can play a role in overcoming the organisations' barriers. Parveen (2020) illustrated that empowerment and Saudi women's presence have hugely and positively transformed according to the statistics from 2010 to 2020, which relate to the results in this study. Also, it emphasised the equality between two genders laws that have been implemented by the Saudi labour minister and discussed openly where they can be connected to the responsive environment.

Additionally, exploring the level of organisations' responsiveness in this study can provide more explanations for the deep characteristics of each type. It is a considerable factor in this study that can explain why women can behave effectively or ineffectively in their managerial roles. According to multiple scholars, organizational culture has a significant impact on women's leadership effectiveness, with hurdles frequently stemming from prejudices and biases (Valentine and Godkin, 2000; Swim and Hyers, 1999; Selzer and Robles, 2019; Longman, 2018; Tabassum and Nayak, 2021). Women leaders frequently face barriers to professional advancement as a result of these stereotypes, which can manifest in a variety of ways, including a lack of access to mentorship and sponsorship opportunities, exclusion from informal networks, and the perception that their leadership abilities are less credible than those of their male colleagues. In spite of these obstacles, women who achieve success in high-level leadership roles frequently exhibit a unique leadership style that can provide substantial advantages to their organisations. The

increased representation of women in leadership positions can have a positive impact on organisational performance and culture, potentially encouraging greater inclusivity, creativity, and innovation (Savigny, 2014; Bawazeer, 2015). Thus, the findings of this chapter can enhance our understanding of how women interrupt this organisational culture and how each type supports or hinders them.

Furthermore, there are several Saudi publications focused on the organisational barriers rather than the advantages (Alotaibi, 2020; Alsubaihi, 2016; Alghamdi, 2023). Moreover, the previous scholars emphasised that bureaucracy, lack of connections, difficulty to change, and hierarchical relations are aspects of an unresponsive environment. However, it is also important to understand the other bright side that promotes women's performance and allows them to be more creative. In addition, the findings' in Alghamdi's (2023) significantly represent the "belonging and integration" themes as perceived by the participants in responsive unite. Finally, social change as a supportive aspect of accepting women in leadership positions is confirmed (Alghamdi, 2023). This study recommends conducting further research discovering the differences regarding to the universities' structure (benefits and challenges), rate of empowering women, new policy changes related to Vision 2030.

8.6. Leadership style

Leadership style is the second main theme that has been explored in their participants' responses. The first main theme in this chapter, as presented above, illustrates the organisational culture for each type (responsive, unresponsive, and semi-responsive). A study by Akanji *et al.*, 2020 emphasised that organisational culture influences women's leadership style. So, in this section, the leadership styles are going to be presented in terms of how each organisational culture type affects the implementation of their leadership style.

8.7. Leadership styles in the responsive environment

The responsive environment, as it has been discussed earlier, is distinguished by being stimulating, having high collaboration, having effective communication, and having equal opportunity between the two genders. The participants in this environment show high variety in terms of the number of leadership styles employed compared to the

unresponsive, where it was limited. There are four different leadership styles that have been presented below in Figure 7 by seven participants: democratic, transformational, strategic, and empathetic.

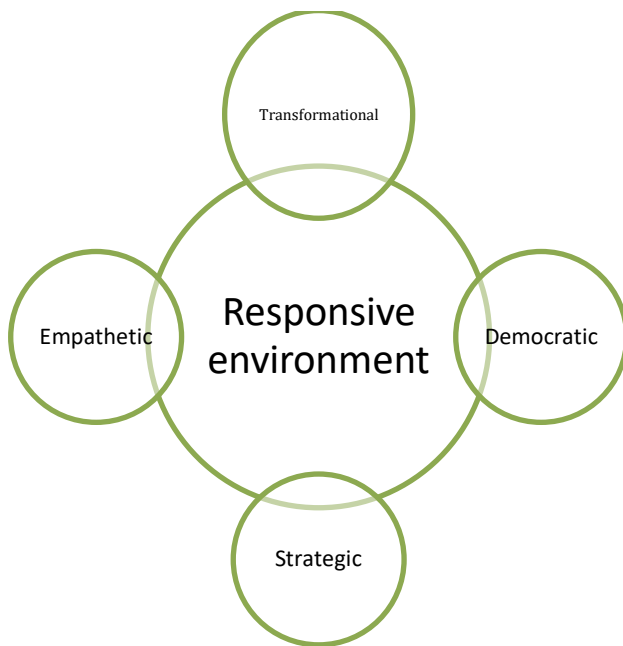


Figure 7: Leadership styles in the responsive environment.

Source: *Researcher's own construction*

The transformational leadership style is adopted by P18. Leaders in this style make reforms in their environment and encourage their subordinates to act based on that, also it improves employees' awareness of certain issues, inspiring them to develop (Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019; Asbari, 2021). Her comment was:

If I want to make a specific change, I explain to employees why we made this change, and if they need preparations on the require change, I support them. This decrease the resistance in my workplace because I explained to them the reason for the change and trained them on what helps them implement that change, and most of the time they are aware that we want to change in order to develop our capabilities and we want to change until we achieve our goals.

P18 articulated her leadership approach in a manner that closely aligns with the characteristics of a responsive environment, specifically the sense of "belonging." She was very aware of her team's feelings; she understood that change is hard to do if one does not understand the point. So, she did not treat them as bosses but as part of them.

Further, the democratic leadership style, where leader allows her staff to exchange their opinions before making final decisions. It provides the employee with an appreciation that their position is valued, which inspires and improves their capacity for creativity (Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019). Democracy's leadership style is presented in this section by various participants' perspective. As avoiding centralisation by P15 and valuing teamwork by P8. P15 stated that:

When we have a problem, I present it to all the teamwork, stay away from centralization in decision-making, and try as much as possible to present my ideas from my point of view. I tell them that I also have a point of view. Then hear their opinions and make the appropriate decision in partnership. This increases their motivation to do their tasks. According to what I heard from the feedback of colleagues, they told me that this made it easier for them to carry out a lot of tasks.

P8 said:

As a leader, I do not believe in guaranteeing that the goal is achieved, but I trust that I choose the right person in the department and the tasks he or she likes. So, I define the team's interests. For example, who likes the research area and who is interested in activities or courses, and so on. As a manager, you must gain the trust of the team and be what they wish for and need. Therefore, they will be comfortable and work as a team. I believe the success of the leader depends on the success of her team.

Leaders adopted democratic leadership styles based on their connection to responsive environments, "stimulated environments," and effective communication. Therefore, it was evident that their perception of this culture influenced their behavior.

Moreover, two different leaders in this environment presented the other two leadership styles: strategic and empathetic. Despite the limited number of leadership styles, I found it significant to observe the diversity among all seven participants individually and collectively in a responsive environment, as evidenced by the presented findings. This

study's significance lies in examining the impact of each type of environment on the entire group, as well as individual perceptions. As previously stated, the thesis goal is not to generalize, but rather to understand their perception of their work culture and its influence on their leadership style.

P12 followed the strategic style which has shown that there is a notable connection between it and the positive workplace (Kiyak et al., 2011). She has a plan every five years for her college. Also, another plan to follow up this strategic plan:

I have a strategic plan, and we have made an action plan and decided the purpose of it. Then, I have a follow-up plan and a follow-up team. And I follow up with the follow-up team through a meeting and know the plan, what we have reached, and how far we have reached because the plan is five-year and every five years, we are supposed to reach certain indicators

P12 not only focused on plans, but also explained her role in applying certain techniques to ensure the work's effectiveness. She said:

So, we have a plan to follow up and follow-up not only by communication but also by field tours and my physical presence as a leader. Presence means the dean must be there, go to work, and make tours of the offices to see the situation.

Effective communication, one of the characteristics of a responsive environment, supports the P12 style of leadership.

P17 followed the empathetic leadership style (Negoro and Wibowo, 2021), she was very motivated in leading her department. Moreover, she described herself as one who believe intensely on motivations. Her response was:

I am a person who enjoys praising my team. I adore compliments. I enjoy being a motivator for what one accomplishes. I am continually encouraging them. I love to celebrate with them and have that positive vibe,

This preceding quotation not only reflected her self-description, but also illustrated how her personality exemplified her leadership abilities and management strategies. She added:

During the winter season, we celebrate as a team with a party that I consider a winter sortie at the college itself. During Corona's pandemic, I celebrated their recovery. We hold various activities and festivities to refresh the atmosphere. At the end of the semester, I like to acknowledge and thank the members at these events by certificates of appreciation. Motivation is the only successful way in my opinion.

Furthermore, she attested that she did not make autonomous decisions about the team's responsibilities, but instead listened carefully and understood the preferences of each individual, where they could excel and find satisfaction, and then assigned tasks accordingly. It is notable that she followed an empathic leadership style because it is part of who she is as a leader, not because the organization pressures her to follow it. This further highlights her empathetic management style.

In summary: this section focused on understanding the leadership styles of participants who work in a responsive environment. Seven out of the eighteen participants demonstrated the ability to employ various leadership styles, including transformational, democratic, empathic, and strategic. However, the section that follows will cover how the semi-responsive environment shapes the leadership styles of its participants.

8.8. Leadership styles in the semi responsive environment

In the semi-responsive context, leaders demonstrated a range of leadership styles, ranging from assertive, such as autocratic, to empathic, such as empathy leadership style. There are four leadership styles by five participants: democratic, conflict management, empathy, and autocratic as presented in Figure 8.

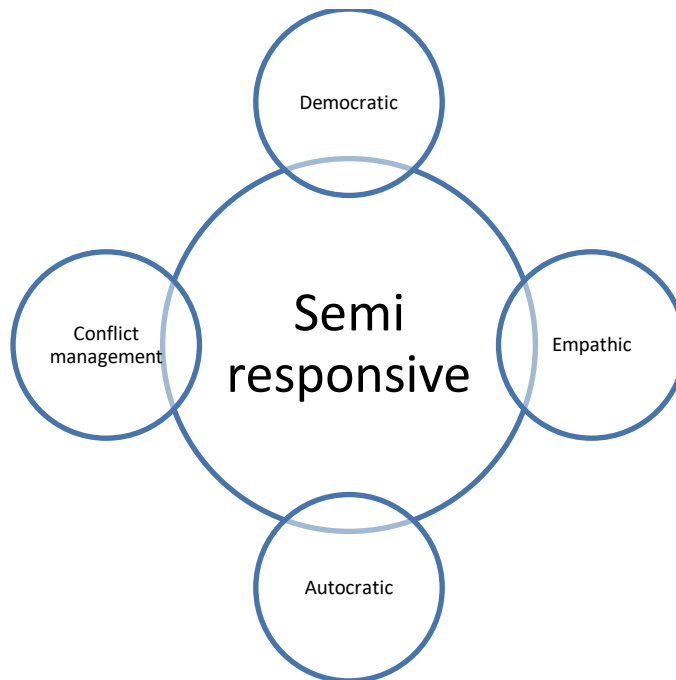


Figure 8: Leadership styles in the semi responsive environment

Source: Researcher's own construction

Autocratic Leadership style has been followed by P10 who faced sexism as an obstacle in her workplace. She described the manner she followed in her department:

I am the direct boss. I propose that you do this and that. They say no, we will do it another way. I realized they do not trust my decisions. Of course, I forced them to do it since I am the direct boss, but I was eventually able to gain their loyalty.

Additionally, she used the solution by firing an employee who did not respond to her decisions appropriately, which confirmed that her style was authoritarian. Further, as an autocratic leader, she perceived her team as:

They have governmental work mentality, so they are spoiled and expecting you not asking a lot of tasks", "They are very very bad in communication and fulfilling the tasks.

On the other hand, P14 found the conflict management approach is the most suitable in the similar environment. She believed that leading by motivation in this approach is the

best option. She tried her best to motivate them with words and by creating a friendly environment:

The work is distributed to the committees, and then it needs follow-up. Motivation and a continuous evaluation of what we have accomplished and what we must achieve are the tools that help me see the progress. Especially the teamwork is weak. Each of them is only concerned with their own personal interests. So, because I do not have any powers or authority over the team, I use motivational methods such as giving them time off or hours of rest. These are simple things that I use to encourage them to accomplish tasks.

In the semi-responsive environment, participants found teamwork challenging, which influenced the P14 approach to addressing this weakness by applying a specific leadership style.

On the other hand, P7 and P9 in the same environment employed the democratic and empathy leadership styles. P7, the Democratic leader, found that this approach maintains a good level of workflow, whereas P9 revealed that the empathetic style supports team unity and collaboration under high pressure of tasks.

P7 comments that:

For any matter related to students' academic levels, curricula, or schedules, there are committees. Each committee has a group of members who share decisions, and during the year or during the semester, I supervise and follow up once, twice, or three times. There will be reports on the meetings of the committees and their performance. If any committees face any difficulty, I do not mind joining them at some of their meetings so that things will be much easier.

While P9 represented the empathic leadership by saying that:

There was a time when one of my co-workers was fatigued and did not speak with me. When I spoke with her, I noticed that she was fatigued and she said, "I cannot focus." So, I worked her job and tasks, and it was high pressure, but I did not alert higher leadership that she did not work and did not attend because I cared about the team being with me all the time and working collaboratively to support each other, understand each other's circumstances, and feel them.

In Summary: the semi-responsive environment also presented a variety of leadership styles, but the drive for leaders to adopt those styles is different from the responsive one, which can show that the organizational culture has an influence on the leadership styles. The discussion section will provide further details on this matter. But first, this study will reveal findings about leadership styles in an unresponsive environment.

8.9. Leadership styles in an unresponsive environment

This is the last type of organisational culture, according to the self-efficacy theory classification. This environment, as it has been discussed above, is frustrated, bureaucratic, and prone to contradictions. In this study, the leadership styles that were implemented were limited by the leaders; six participants employed only two types of leadership styles: transactional and democratic, while it was four approaches in the responsive environment and semi-responsive for seven and five participants respectively. Figure 9 symbolises the leadership styles, and the findings will be presented in detail below.

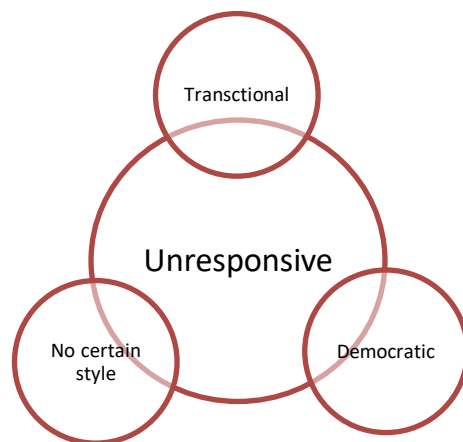


Figure 9: Leadership styles in an unresponsive environment.

Source: Researcher's own construction

Transactional leadership focuses on how leaders influence and support their followers to achieve goals by defining duties and rewarding or punishing their behaviors (Richards,

2020; Akanji *et al.*, 2020). P4 in an unresponsive environment emphasised that it is the best approach to transferring the environment from toxic to positive. She expressed her approach by:

I sit with each administrative employee individually and describe the tasks that she has done and how I am grateful to her for what she did and thank her in detail.

The transactional leadership style includes both rewards and punishments, and that is what she said:

For the failed employee, I talk to her and try to guide and help her, but if she does not want to develop, I make a decision by transferring her to another college and administration.

While the democratic leadership styles have been followed by the majority in this section (four), the reason for that is because the flexibility offered by this approach that can align with level of hurdles. P16 said:

I make a plan for the department and present it to the members because they are part of it; the plan must be developed in cooperation with the members. For example, we will do a project, a specific event, or joint research. It is offered to them, and it is important that they agree to it, so they help me with it. Otherwise, the goals will never be achieved, nor will the issues.

P19 also said that:

The limited authority I possess limits my choices for managing my department. At the end, I have to set goals that everyone agrees on and has the capability to achieve. Ensure that we hold similar opinions that will, in some way, aid me in influencing others.

The unresponsive environment is characterized by frustration, bureaucracy, and resistance to change. In response, leaders apply democratic leadership styles because they believe they cannot make any changes where other leadership styles can, such as strategic and transformational, and because they believe they must minimize the challenges.

Nevertheless, one participant showed a high level of resignation and caution in the administrative style that followed due to the unresponsiveness of the workplace. She expressed that there are many difficulties that cannot be changed, but it is the responsibility of senior management, in contrast to the fact that her limits as head of the department are very limited and executive for predetermined tasks.

I have only one secretary, and I am just a department head, I do not expect my role to implement plans and do different goals, this is outside my authority, I am only here because no one has fulfilled this role in the department, and the expected tasks are simple.

In summary: In an unresponsive environment, academic leaders' leadership approaches were less diverse. For all six, there are only two categories of participants, which can explain how organizational culture influences leadership styles. The subsequent sections will present the relevant literature reviews and discuss the findings.

8.10. Discussions

The findings showed the leadership styles that were employed by eighteen participants in each type of environment. The findings strongly indicate that the type of environment influences a leader's choice of leadership style. Participants in responsive and semi-responsive environments have a variety of leadership styles compared to those in the unresponsive workplace. However, it is noticeable that various leadership styles in semi-responsive environments vary from assertiveness to empathic styles. Whereas the responsive one is moderate between the transformational style and the empathic. On the other hand, the unresponsive unit revealed limited types of leadership styles, as the democratic style demonstrated leaders' leadership approaches.

According to self-efficacy theory, the types of environments affect one's self-efficacy. Leadership self-efficacy related with leaders' perspective to leadership, their role, motivations, teams, and their capabilities which means the leadership style they will employed (Ullah *at el.*, 2021; Adewale & Ghavifekr, 2019). Self-efficacy theory emphasised how the organisational culture can influence individuals and for this reason it divides the organisation into responsive and unresponsive (Adewale & Ghavifekr, 2019;

Bandura, 2001). Findings showed leadership styles are varied in each type of environment.

In a responsive environment, leaders were more comfortable applying the leadership styles they preferred and showed more freedom in their performance as leaders. That is based on their own experience and understanding of leadership.

The study by Denis et al. (2000) investigated the organizations as a complex factor in leadership. They suggested that a manager with extensive experience can evaluate the organisation's strengths and weaknesses, initiate leadership, and select the most suitable administrative style. However, a complex organization can be a problem for the manager, regardless of their experience; she may face unexpected challenges that could impact the chosen leadership style. Therefore, this explains that in the responsive environment this study found, the leaders varied their leadership styles, as if it supported them to work in a way that contributed to their freedom to manage and influence. The participants' perceptions of their organizations were positive, and they were also able to choose leadership styles, which increased positivity of work.

The leadership styles that have been implanted in this type are transformational, strategic, democratic, and empathic. The transformational style has been approved because it contributes to building a positive culture and connects with innovative organizations where leaders are expected to have a positive influence on their teams (Khan *et al.*, 2020). It is illustrated above that the responsive culture in this study is stimulating to its' participants which enhance following a transformational style. Further, the strategic leadership style is related positively to stimulated work culture (Shao, 2019). In responsive environments, a strategic leadership style necessitates high organisational clarity, which is part of communication and motivation. It was evident to her that the environment aided her in implementing this leadership style, as a lack of motivation or miscommunication can hinder individuals from following this approach and achieving specific goals (Meng & Berger, 2019). It also implied that regularity, engagement, and vision increased optimism in the workplace, all of which are components of a strategic leadership style (Ibid,2).

Empathic and democratic leadership styles were also employed in this type of environment. This study's responsive environment stands out due to its homely atmosphere, positive communication, motivation, and equal opportunities for both men and women. The academic leaders in this group employed democratic and empathetic leadership styles for positive purposes, as this illustrates. An empathic academic leader in this study expressed that she is surrounded by motivations in her workplace, and it is noticeable that she adopted the same approach in her leadership. Additionally, democratic styles are implemented in this environment for avoiding centralisation and to enhance teamwork value which refers to how do they perceive the responsive workplace.

In contrast, empathy and democratic styles have been employed in the semi-responsive environment, but for different reasons. The democratic was for sustaining a high level of productivity in the face of unanticipated problems that come with work. Under intense pressure, the empathy approach was also employed to retain encouragement for collaboration among teams. Moreover, according to Sethuraman and Jayshree (2014) the leadership style will fluctuate in accordance with the situational factors and the attitudes present in the work environment, which enable the leader to influence his followers, solve problems, and effect change. The group in the semi-responsive environment suffers from workload, teamwork, and resistance, which is why participants adopted those leadership styles.

Furthermore, compared to the responsive, the semi-responsive revealed leadership styles by leaders employed as a result of environmental conflict. For example, the autocratic style is a result of sexism, and conflict management is a response to teamwork conflicts. Moreover, it has been mentioned that women leaders frequently implement transformational or democratic leadership behaviors, which prioritize collaboration and empowerment (Sethuraman and Jayshree, 2014). They may, however, resort to more authoritarian or directive forms of leadership in order to establish their authority and dispel doubt in environments where gender biases are deeply embedded (Cuadrado et al., 2012). It is acknowledged that the autocratic style has downsides and benefits, such as eliminating initiative and saving time for crucial decisions (Toepfl, 2020). This implies that organisations have a significant impact on the leadership approach they adopt to oversee

their teams and workload. The significance of the findings lies in understanding how a semi-responsive environment shaped their leadership styles, which confirmed what self-efficacy theory stated (Almutairi, 2020; Bandura, 2001).

On the other hand, in an unresponsive environment, participants showed limited ability to employ multiple leadership styles. However, the transactional leadership style was the only approach in this environment that was implemented to improve and reform the work culture. This approach uses incentives and punishment to make changes and develop the workplace (Aljumah, 2023; Akanji *et al.*, 2020). According to the self-efficacy theory, a leader with high self-efficacy in an unresponsive environment has a high ability to improve it (Gassemi *et al.*, 2021). Nevertheless, this study does not aim to determine the level of their self-efficacy in terms of their leadership style, but it was noticeable in the unresponsive environment due to the high challenges. By contrast to the transactional approach, the democratic one, where leaders' follow it due to the high challenges that are outside of their authority and hard to deal with, particularly bureaucracy and paradoxical leadership, as has been discussed above. The democratic goal was to maintain support in order to achieve as many of the goals as possible. On the other side, uncertainty in following leadership styles has been revealed only in this environment. The participants showed high caution and blame to the higher leadership for the slow improvement and high obstacles. For this reason, her leadership perspective to her ability was limited to change or influence.

Interpreting how women lead or why they apply certain leadership styles cannot be fully understood without realising how the organisations are working around them, the challenges they faced, and how they perceived them. Several scholars have linked women's leadership styles to societal expectations about gender roles, which promote caring and collaborative behaviours (Renigunta *et al.*, 2022; Mulawarman and Komariyah, 2021; Valentine and Godkin, 2000). But what if the organisation, not society, has the biggest influence on how women lead? The findings show that organizational challenges and benefits have a significant influence on women's leadership behaviors. They may lead by applying transactional and autocratic leadership styles where studies relate those styles to men's leadership styles, or they may lead by applying democratic and empathic

leadership styles. And it is not about gender; it is about their team, their organisations, and the issues they need to solve.

Furthermore, this study discovered a significant deficit in research in Saudi higher education that is beneficial in understanding the women's leadership style in relation to the environment or experience. Most of studies focus on understanding the outcome of leadership style on the level of employees' performance and motivations (Altheeb, 2020; Saad Alessa, 2021; Alomiri, 2016). However, the empathic leadership style is considered the preference for women's leaders with employees in the Saudi public sector according to Zailaa and Hamas (2021). Moreover, Altheeb (2020) confirmed that the empathy and transformational styles is most suitable in Saudi work culture compared to autocratic to keep the motivations level high. The empathy style showed in this study by two participants in the responsive and semi responsive environments and it was discussed above the organisational reasons.

Moreover, gendered leadership styles have been discussed widely and that is in regard to personality and cultural differences more than the organisational factors (Miranda, 2019; Stelter, 2002; Gipson *et al.*, 2017). Women in nature related more to democratic style and men to the autocratic (Gipson *et al.*, 2017). Nevertheless, findings of this thesis focused on women's leadership styles and both styles (democratic and autocratic) have revealed due to the organisational factor, also it can be related to the personal perspective to leadership but is not part of the findings. In addition, Gipson *et al.* (2017) discussed that women are distinguished by the transactional and transformational styles compared to men. The findings in this study showed that two of the participants employed them in two different environmental types. While the majority of participants followed the democratic leadership style, earlier it was discussed how the environment type influenced their leadership styles.

Nevertheless, reflecting on leadership style, it can be challenging to assume that a leader will mostly adhere to one specific style. Leadership styles, particularly in academic contexts, are characterized by a complex interplay of situational demands, relationships, and behaviors. The literature review chapters have highlighted the complexity of academic leadership, which involves organisations, society, and students. However, the

analysis of this thesis reveals that a single leadership style exists, as the analysis relies on the responses provided by participants. Therefore, I believe further research needs to be conducted in this area to discover the extent to which academic leaders can employ different leadership styles to achieve their goals.

8.11. Conclusions

The current chapter has analysed and discussed the findings acquired on Saudi women academic leaders in head of departments and deans at four Riyadh universities. The findings include categories of the participants' organisational cultures, which are divided into three types: responsive, semi-responsive, and unresponsive. Additionally, a deep understanding was gained of how each participant perceived the pros and cons of the environment that enabled or controlled their choice of leadership style. Further, the positive environment promotes variety and more freedom for leaders to lead, while the negative one limits their capabilities and increases challenges. Analysing the findings provides an answer to the research question. The final chapter will summarise the numerous findings collected during the current research. It will also include a comprehensive summary of the study, including the study's implications for policy and practices, as well as a summary of the study's limitations. This chapter will also provide recommendations for future studies and guidelines based on the findings.

Chapter 9: Conclusion and recommendations

9. Introduction

This study contributes to the theory and practice of understanding individual leadership behaviour and how internal and external factors influence it. The thesis specifically aims to improve our understanding of how women leaders behave during periods of change, such as empowerment, organisational growth, or challenges in the work environment.

This chapter will present the conclusion of the thesis in several sections. What is this study about? How has it been investigated? What was asked, and what was found? What contributes to the knowledge, the implications, and the limitations? After that, I will present the recommendations, the researcher's story, and suggestions for future research.

9.1. What is this study about?

Life, labour, and the social standing of Saudi women have all been focal points of research devoted to empowering women in Saudi Arabia for some time (Kattan, 2015; Gazzaz, 2017; Alsharif, 2018). Such studies discuss and explain the culture and rights - and what they have and what they do not. Scholars have shown how social norms, often embedded in legislation, have represented major barriers for Saudi women in general, as well as in higher education. These barriers include restrictions on freedom of transportation, limited professional opportunities, and stereotypes that reinforce the negative perception that women are inferior and unfit for leadership positions (Abalkhail, 2017; Abalkhail & Allan, 2015; Abdullah Dahlan, 2023). Moreover, much research has described this culture as patriarchal that controls the gender roles and expectations, making it difficult for women to break through the glass ceiling and assume leadership positions in academia (Abu Alsuood & Youde, 2018). Nevertheless, in order to achieve gender equity, the emphasis on empowering Saudi women has been revised and enhanced in light of the implementation of Vision 2030 (Abuhjeeleh, 2019; Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). Reforms and programmes launched under Vision 2030 aim to promote gender equality, increase women's leadership opportunities, and strengthen their networks with different governmental and private sectors (Parveen, 2022). These

programmes are essential in breaking down cultural barriers that have hitherto prevented women from pursuing and leading in higher education.

However, despite numerous studies that have been driven by the significance of women's empowerment, this research specifically aims to comprehend the experiences of women after being granted sudden empowerment due to Vision 2030 in several aspects of their lives, particularly in their administrative and academic roles within Saudi higher education institutions. The sudden shift in empowerment presents unique challenges and opportunities, shaping the positions of women's roles in academia. That has required an understanding of the dynamics of this transition which is pivotal in fostering an environment that supports their professional growth and overall well-being.

9.2. How has it been investigated?

The study aims to hear the voices and feelings of Saudi women academic leaders, thus qualitative methods has employed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eighteen participants consisting of heads of departments and deans from different universities in Riyadh. In addition, this study used interviews as a tool to encourage participants to be open to their ideas and experiences through conversation, which can produce a wealth of information and in-depth analysis (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Kallio et al., 2016).

Moreover, self-efficacy theory has been applied in this study as a conceptual framework. Self-efficacy as a theory has been used to investigate leadership fields specially to understand leaders' behaviours and leaders' potential developments. Leadership self-efficacy refers to the leader's performance, but specifically in relation to her interaction with external and internal factors. For example, one's self-beliefs, and the different organisation that each individual works in. If one has high self-beliefs toward her ability, that will enhance her ability to solve problems and manage her department effectively. In contrast, if she has low self-beliefs, that will influence her ability to succeed and achieve her goals. Additionally, the organisational itself and how it operates clearly has an impact on how one can achieve or be creative. The Organisation has the power to hinder one's ability, whether or not the female manager has high skills and high self-beliefs (Bandura, 1999).

Furthermore, the other reason that drives this study to apply self-efficacy theory is to understand who Saudi women in academic leadership roles are, how they behave according to their self-beliefs and what sources of leadership self-efficacy they have that enable or limit them. In addition, how female managers currently perceive their organisation and in turn how they have adopted specific, tailored leadership styles. As it has been pointed out in the literature reviews section, Saudi women have indeed experienced significant changes which are related to Vision 2030 (Alotaibi, 2020; Hakiem, 2022).

9.3. What was asked?

This method was developed to address the research questions that have been derived from self-efficacy theory factors that my personal story (which will be shared later) was inspired by. Three questions have been constructed in relation to the three factors in self-efficacy as below:

1. **Sources of leadership self-efficacy:** To what extent are sources of leadership self-efficacy (experiences, training, influence of emotions, verbal effect) available to Saudi academic women leaders in their workplace, from their own unique perspectives?
2. **Self-efficacy beliefs:** How do Saudi women academic leaders' beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?
3. **Organisation and behaviours:** How do the environmental work types (responsiveness, unresponsiveness, and semi-responsiveness) influence Saudi academic female leaders' specific leadership styles?

9.4. What was found?

The analysis and discussions of the above questions have been presented in the six, seventh, and eighth chapters; and each question has been analysed and discussed individually. The sixth chapter of analysis and discussion presents the sources of leadership self-efficacy; the seventh chapter is related to women's beliefs; and the eighth chapter discusses the organisations in question. The following paragraph presents the summary of the data analysis for this thesis.

First research question:

- To what extent are sources of leadership self-efficacy (experiences, training, influence of emotions, verbal effect) available and influential to Saudi academic women leaders in their workplace, from their own unique perspectives?

As it has been pointed out in the literature review, experience for Saudi women in leadership positions have been hitherto limited due to social, organisational and cultural restrictions (Tameem, 2019; Davidsson, 2022). In addition, there has been a lack of role models and reduced or limited training opportunities. For this reason, the identification of the sources of leadership self-efficacy has become increasingly significant, and this is what the thesis has investigated through its first research question. It aims to understand more about the sources contributing to the performance of Saudi women academics in managerial roles, the extent to which these resources are available, and how they have influenced each female leader. Furthermore, the theory of self-efficacy has supported my questions in relation to awareness of the sources of behaviour for women in leadership - which has led to their employment, as mentioned in the theoretical framework. There are five different sources of leadership self-efficacy that have been identified in relation to the themes, which are: experience, training, role models, emotional influence, and verbal impact. The results of each source are summarised in the following paragraph.

Experience: Lack and weak experience has been found in several international and Saudi studies as one of the hurdles that Saudi women face (Saleh and Malibari, 2021; Fisk & Overton, 2019; Campuzano, 2019; Hakiem, 2022). According to this study's findings, one's experience has a significant impact. Participants who had no prior experience faced challenges in managing and dealing with work problems. Nevertheless, experience is not the only factor that can help someone in her or his role; collaboration, teamwork, and a supportive organisational atmosphere can also be factors that enhance new leaders. Furthermore, experience as a source can be extended or limited to the same field. For example, if one has experience in certain roles, but it is in a different area or with different challenges, it may not necessarily help in the new role. This case was found with a participant who has leadership experience in an area that focuses on one

dimension, such as scientific research, and then when she moved to become the head of department, it was harder because of the multiple challenges from different areas. Thus, the type of experience can be supported, or it may not.

Moreover, this study has revealed experience in multiple sectors. It has a significant influence on a leader's knowledge, experience, skills, and flexibility. However, the issue that one can face is trust from the new team or adaption to new organisations' policies and procedures. Finally, as this study explored Saudi women's experiences, new types of experiences have been presented, such as managing two sections of men and women (new roles by Vision 2030). The participants who started these roles were excited and well-prepared to succeed, and they found the role to be a considerable part of growth in the Saudi higher education system. This is because it will solve the disagreement between the management in both sections and increase the quality of it.

Training and role-models: Training sessions have been argued to be a source that empowers individuals with skills (Abou Hashish and Bajbeir, 2022; Bandura, 1999; Lartey et al., 2023; Sonnino, 2016). However, not all training courses in this study have the same impact due to their poor quality or because they do not match the learner's needs. Additionally, this study found that higher education organisations for the sample may offer courses but crucially they do not offer time for them. Therefore, the training has a low influence on women's leadership self-efficacy.

On the other hand, role models also serve as a significant source of leadership self-efficacy. This study's findings show that the impact of the role model is different. There is a role model that is closer to the participant, allowing her to benefit more from her experience and expertise and gain a deeper understanding of how she manages the position. On the other hand, there may be a distant role model where the participant has seen her and seen her successes, which has inspired her to apply for promotion, but at times of difficulty she could not know how her role model solved specific problems, which renders the notion of a role model to be of low impact. Distance and close role models clearly have different influences on the participants' leadership self-efficacy.

Emotional source: Satisfaction and wellbeing have an impact on the employees'

performance (Al-maaitah et al., 2021; Azeem et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2019). The emotional source established in this study is divided into two main themes: negative feelings and positive feelings. Each type of feeling influences women's performance in this study in terms of motivation, behaviour, achievements, aspiration, issue accumulation, and job exhaustion. The grateful feeling increased their jobs' loyalty, teams' trust, and ability to build a positive atmosphere. In addition, the comfortable feeling provides them with the ability to make an independent decision, understand the changes due to Vision 2030, and contribute to its development. On the other hand, the negative feelings were shown by dissatisfaction and exhaustion. Dissatisfaction was due to the fake achievements of colleagues that did not support the workplace, ignoring the issues that led to complex problems, and the workplace being unprogressive and regressive. The feelings of exhaustion were also one of the negative feelings women noted due to their high workload, which led to their inability to follow up on plans and gave them a lack of desire to carry out their duties. It has been confirmed that emotions are one of the sources that affect individuals' behaviours (Usher *et al.*, 2015; Bazadough & Sulaiman, 2023).

Verbal effects: This is the last source revealed by the thesis, and it is significant because communication is based mainly on words. It is important to discover how those words influence performance, work atmosphere, and one's beliefs. In addition, Muthusamy (2019) mentioned that words shape our lives and have been used historically to change and influence people. Additionally, words shape thoughts and, consequently, one's behaviour. The research found that the use of words by Saudi women in academic leadership roles are divided into three core themes: negative, positive, and neutral.

The positive verbal is represented by thankful words, that provide participants the support to increase their achievements and gave them a sense of belonging and pride towards their workplace. Conversely, the negative words cause discrimination, disharmony, toxic competition, and increase the pressure and sense of loneliness. On the other hand, the neutral theme reflects the emotional intelligence that increases the female leaders' ability to focus and enables them to *not* take any words personally.

Second research question:

- How do Saudi women academic leaders' self-beliefs influence their leadership self-efficacy?

The findings revealed that leadership self-efficacy, within this sample, could be broadly grouped into high or low. Certain beliefs influence each level. According to Bandura (2001), what an individual believes towards her or his ability to achieve her tasks will thus influence the final outcomes. However, this study added that not every positive belief can enhance one ability, and not every negative belief may hinder managers from progressing and making changes. Therefore, this study shows that regardless of the type of belief, it can lead to two different levels of leadership self-efficacy, as below:

1. Low leadership self-efficacy:

The beliefs of participants in this category can be positive or negative in relation to their ability to perform their roles. For example, uncertainty is negative, and regularity and confidence are positive. Nevertheless, neither type of belief enhances a woman leader's ability to perform her role effectively. This study has revealed that this group's positive beliefs stem from their lack of experience in the same role, together with their unrealistic perception of the management position. Consequently, such a type of belief lowers their leadership self-efficacy. Further, this first group, classified as having low leadership self-efficacy, is due to leadership behavioural outcomes. For example, minimising their ability and their role, blaming others for failures, failing to deal with multidimensional goals, and being unable to motivate or create a positive work atmosphere.

Scholars found that leadership self-efficacy for women can be negatively influenced if there is a lack of sources that builds self-efficacy, such as experience (Hartman & Barber, 2020; Nakamura et al., 2022). Moreover, Saudi researchers have added that Saudi women's higher education lacks training, experience, and authority, which further explains why this type of belief is not helpful in enhancing their level of leadership self-efficacy (Abalkhail, 2017; Alotaibi, 2020).

2. High leadership self-efficacy

Accordingly, the beliefs in this group were also positive and negative. The negative side included the fears, conflicts, and the issue of being a female manager in her role for the first time. Meanwhile, the positive beliefs were driven by their aspiration, confidence, and qualifications.

This group's negative beliefs have been experienced for a variety of reasons. As an example, a female leader fears being judged as a woman because she works in a male dominated organisation. It has been noted that male dominant organisations and limited women's opportunities only increased the stereotype (Zimmer, 2014; Herbst, 2020). Moreover, due to gender biases, women in leadership roles pay a higher price for their mistakes than do men (Fisk & Overton, 2019).

The other two negative beliefs are related to the handling of new challenges at work, such as team conflicts and setting new departmental goals. However, all of them were able to recognise their own beliefs, overcome them, and solve their own problems. This means that negative beliefs do not always lead to low leadership self-efficacy. In Hampton's (2013) study, they explored leaders' concerns about the unknown as a result of a lack of experience and confusion about how things will be processed. It was also found that when leaders can understand their fears, it enhances their efficacy (Solansky et al., 2023).

Conversely, the high leadership self-efficacy group held positive beliefs related to aspirations, merit, and confidence. Several studies have discussed the significance of aspirations in promoting and overcoming women's barriers to leadership (Sanchez and Lehnert, 2019; Alsubhi et al., 2018). In addition, having qualifications leads to positive belief, even though some studies have pointed out that women may feel less qualified in male dominant culture (Lartey et al., 2023; Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Additionally, in this study, it was shown to enhance leadership self-efficacy.

While confidence is reflected in positive beliefs, in this study it was found that it has two different effects. High confidence supported participants to lead and inspire their team, while overconfidence in fact damaged the team, leading the manager to perceive that her decisions were correct and that her team could not implement them because they were

too poorly skilled to do so. Excessive confidence has created disagreement in the work environment, while high confidence has created harmony among the work team. The difference in confidence type is related to how the female leaders gain it in the first place. High-confidence leaders build their own confidence from colleagues' trust, higher leadership rewards, and from their leadership experience, whereas over-confidence tends to be based on a leader's own personal achievements. Machida & Schaubroeck (2011) argue that overconfidence in an individual's ability may not lead to the development of leadership skills, but rather to self-satisfaction and low understanding of team management, which in turn invariably creates conflicts.

However, the high leadership self-efficacy group are distinguished by being able to achieve their goals, motivate their teams, solve conflicts, overcome stereotypes, have a growth mindset, and make initiatives.

In conclusion, not all beliefs have a positive impact on self-efficacy. Even positive beliefs, if they are not shaped by relevant experience, feedback from colleagues, or situations, can become weak and hinder a leader's leadership abilities. While negative beliefs may stem from uncertainty about the future or erroneous self-perceptions, such as stereotypes, a leader can transform these beliefs into strengths once they begin to work in the field (Hampton, 2013; Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023; Machida and Schaubroeck, 2011; Dwyer, 2019).

Third research question:

- How do the environmental work types (responsiveness, unresponsiveness, and semi-responsiveness) influence Saudi academic women's leaders' leadership styles?

The difference in outcomes and behaviour could be due to external factors such as organisation which was an issue also found by several scholars (Campuzano, 2019; Fuller, 2014). That drove me to explore the organisation itself as an influential factor. Additionally, it is confirmed by self-efficacy theory that organisations are one of the factors that influence one's leadership self-efficacy (Murphy, 2016; Alhalafi, 2022).

Furthermore, according to the theoretical framework, there are three types of organisations that influence participants in this study: responsive, semi-responsive, and unresponsive. The findings were in response to the third research question: How do the environmental work types (responsiveness, unresponsiveness, and semi-responsiveness) influence Saudi academic women's leaders' leadership styles? The responsive environment was related to a positive work culture because it gave employees the freedom to express their creativity and abilities and motivated them. The semi-responsive environment is a place where employees can work and obtain benefits, but they may also encounter obstacles that necessitate significant decision-making or time to resolve. For example, a semi-responsive environment fosters teamwork, but it also contains bureaucracy. While the notion of being unresponsive is when employees feel exhausted and are unable to change or solve problems. The results revealed that each type of organisation created certain benefits and challenges that influenced their leadership styles.

The responsive environment stimulates effective teamwork and integration between both binary genders (men and women), while also fostering appreciation. That atmosphere influences their freedom in adapting the leadership style they prefer, and is clearly a result of the findings of this study. In a responsive environment, academic leaders adapted four types of leadership styles. The democratic leadership style is one in which the leader makes decisions with the team's participation (Sethuraman and Jayshree, 2014). The transformational style is where a leader aims to make change through inspiration techniques (Martinez-Leon et al., 2020). Additionally, the strategic style involves a leader having a clear vision and is devising plans to achieve their goals (Özer and Tınaztepe, 2014). The final style was empathic, where leaders lead by empathising, understanding the feelings and needs of their team, and then motivating them to achieve their objectives (Kock et al., 2019). In a more responsive environment, the participants were more creative, had more achievements, and had the ability to make changes by employing various leadership styles.

There is a significant relationship between a responsive organisation and the specific type of leadership style. All types of leadership styles (democratic, transformational,

strategic, and empathic) enhance positivity in the work culture. This implies that either the responsive environment encourages the leader to adopt a style that aligns with the work culture, or the organisation provides them with the freedom to choose a style that aligns with their perspective to manage the workplace. In accordance with the study, Aydın (2018), by discovering how organisational culture influences the leadership styles, found that hierarchy culture influences leaders to follow paternalistic leadership styles, whereas adhocracy culture motivates leaders to follow transformational leadership styles. This can also explain how leaders' perceptions of responsiveness increase the diversity of leadership styles.

The semi-responsive environment combines the positive aspects of women's empowerment and teamwork with the negative aspects of workload, sexism, and employee resistance. It has been classified as semi-responsive because participants were able to solve the challenges. Consequently, the leadership styles that were employed at this type were: autocratic, where the leader deals as the only boss and the employee must follow her order and conflict management, where the leader applies certain techniques to solve the conflicts among the team (Cuadrado et al., 2012; Rahim and Katz, 2020). In addition, there are the democratic and empathic styles, which have been defined above. In this environment, leaders were also influenced by semi-responsiveness. For instance, the leader who faced resistance applied conflict management, and the autocratic was employed to deal with sexism as a threat. Additionally, democratic and empathetic styles were applied to increase the level of responsiveness in the organisation and reduce the difficulties employees faced, such as workload. Sethuraman and Jayshree (2014) stated that leadership styles will change depending on the circumstances and the vibe in the workplace, which allow the leader to affect change, address problems, and influence his (or her) followers.

The hardness of the unresponsive environment was represented by the bureaucracy, paradoxical leadership, stereotypes, and frustrating workplace. The leadership styles in the unresponsive environment were more limited compared to the other organisational types. There were only two kinds of leadership styles in evidence: the transactional and democratic. In transactional leadership, the leader aims to change by

applying rewards and punishments (Al-maaitah et al., 2021). Moreover, this type of environment exclusively exhibits "no specific style". Furthermore, the participants in this type of environment expressed that they were adopting a democratic style because there were no other options available to manage their roles. There are many issues that they cannot change or deal with. Therefore, they did not adopt democracy because they desired it, but rather because of the nature of the organisation.

Finally, the type of organisation influences leaders' ability to adapt to the leadership styles they prefer or hope to embrace in order to manage their roles.

9.5. What is the contribution to the knowledge?

This study's main contribution relates to three areas: the global level, the local level - which is Saudi women - and the level of individual readers.

On a global level, this study is qualitative, which enhances our understanding of how women's leadership self-efficacy can be influenced in higher education. Studies on leadership self-efficacy among women in higher education are scarce. Most of these studies concentrate on understanding the challenges women face in their workplace, and the factors that limit their opportunities (Nachatar Singh, 2022; Latu et al., 2019; Selzer and Robles, 2019). However, this research has investigated leadership self-efficacy from all aspects influencing self-efficacy on a focused sample, for example, beliefs, organisations, and sources of leadership self-efficacy. This allows for an in-depth understanding of how self-efficacy can strengthen or weaken, as well as the reasons that lead to this. Furthermore, the study could assist researchers in understanding how to further empower women in leadership roles and comprehending their behaviour in relation to the internal and external elements that might enhance gender equity.

Moreover, exploring all three factors and how they influence participants provides a richer understanding of why and how they relate to self-efficacy in leadership. As an example, not every positive belief can enhance a leader's ability to manage, and not all sources of leadership self-efficacy can be effective, even if they own them.

Furthermore, the discussion of women's leadership in higher education has primarily focused on their preference for certain leadership styles, such as transformational, over transactional, and democratic, over authoritarian (Renigunta et al., 2022; Miranda, 2019). However, this study provides a detailed explanation to understand the type of leadership style women follow and indications as to why. Although this study does not generalise its findings, it is important to explain how different (external and internal) factors, regardless of gender role, influence women's preference for certain leadership styles.

Moreover, this study can provide organisations of higher education with information about the obstacles women face in aspiring to, and managing leadership positions in terms of beliefs, organisational challenges, and a lack of leadership self-efficacy. It potentially allows universities to consider how these different factors are important - who their leaders are, how the organisational culture supports or hinders their ability to lead, and how they might develop as leaders. Understanding this also means that enabling women to lead effectively requires a wider understanding of who they are, their histories, the support they need, and the kinds of organisational conditions where they can lead effectively.

Furthermore, the study provides a wider understanding of the structure of universities and their influence on leaders' performance. It encompasses not only marketing and ranking, but also the internal environments within the colleges, which can enhance the quality of the final results.

In the local contribution, this is a critical time for Saudi women; it is a time where Vision 2030 requires high transformation in higher education organisations and managing higher levels of leadership positions. Therefore, the significance of the study during this time is to understand what resources Saudi women have that enable them to manage their new positions; what are their own beliefs about their own abilities (i.e., do they help them or not)? In addition, since this historic phase of change in Saudi Arabia is characterised by women's empowerment, conducting this research at this new time supports an understanding of how women can be empowered by understanding all aspects that equip them, such as environmental conditions and possessing

leadership skills. In addition, it also highlights that there are still obstacles at the personal, organisational, and cultural levels, despite the fact that the policies may have been altered pursuant to Vision 2030 (Hodges, 2017). Thus, it becomes increasingly important to comprehend the policies thoroughly.

Furthermore, this study provides a rich picture of the relationship between self-beliefs for Saudi women, which can be considered an identity, and the culture that influences them. A study by Alharbi (2023) examines the building of leadership identity among Saudi women and how it could have an impact on Saudi women's developmental readiness for advanced leadership positions. The study's findings revealed that rigorous and institutional gender practices rooted in the social and cultural context form the foundation of the Saudi women leader's identity, which contradicts the expected readiness of Saudi women after the Vision 2030 announcement. However, the study examined it from one aspect which is the participants' perceptions about their identity. Thus, the contribution of this study may illustrate how complex factors such as culture, identity, and organisations shape the behaviour of leaders in consideration of self-identity. Leadership is a skill that has no gender, and exploring the complex factors together only adds to our understanding of it.

To the individual readers, this study can enhance in-depth understanding for an individual to know who she or he is and where he or she is, which influences how she sees herself and acts as a leader. It can be an individual roadmap that guides the leader to know more about the skills she has. Understanding the resources, what they have been through, and to what extent these resources developed or reduced their leadership abilities. What resources do they need to develop their leadership growth? In addition, they reflect upon their own self-beliefs towards what they think about leadership roles, what knowledge, experience, colleagues, society, culture, and family influence those beliefs inside them, and how they expect themselves to perform if they are hired.

Furthermore, a leader's behaviour is not only related to who she is but also to the place, the organisation, and the people one works with and manages. Every workplace is different, and each person can perceive and react to these differences in a different

way. However, how the leader perceives the organisation has an impact on behaviours such as problem-solving skills, motivations for the team, setting new goals, sharing creativity, and making changes. The organisation is where someone is on her individual map; understanding the surroundings is significant to evaluating what the leader has and what they do not have, which all helps in improving the workplace (Bruce & Montanez, 2012).

9.6. Research implication

In the literature reviews, I stated that the growth of Saudi women in education is very high and rapid (Alotaibi, 2020). Additionally, it has been mentioned to what extent Saudi women are qualified, but most scholars have discussed their own barriers and challenges (Akbar et al., 2023; Alsubaihi, 2016; Al-Ahmadi, 2011). However, many of those barriers in their way will change as a result of the goals of Vision 2030 (Alotaibi, 2020; Hodges, 2017). For example, the barriers that have been changed include the following: women cannot drive, women cannot travel alone, women who travel need approval from their guardian (father, husband, brother, son), higher leadership positions are only for men, women cannot work in mixed environments, women cannot have full authority due to gender segregated buildings, etc. (Nassir et al., 2019). Nevertheless, all those cultural, organisational, and religious obstacles have arguably changed due to Vision 2030 (Alharbi, 2022). So, how can women behave in academic leadership positions? What influences their behaviour? What sources support their capabilities in the new change? To find the answers and understand more about women's behaviour, this research has employed a theoretical framework, a self-efficacy theory, that supports in-depth understanding. In addition, this study has followed a qualitative methodology that enhanced employing the theory's dimensions to understand Saudi women's own beliefs, the type of organisation they work for, and the (re)source that enhanced their self-efficacy. Further details about the theoretical implications in this study are provided below:

9.6.1. Theoretical implications

- Self-efficacy theory not only studies an individual's level of self-efficacy, whether it is high or low, but it also guides research to explore the in-depth factors that influence people's behaviours in different cultures. For instance, the verbal effect may be a primary factor in one culture, but not in another.

- Experience plays a crucial role in enhancing individual skills. The study's findings indicate that a comprehensive understanding of experience is necessary to gauge its impact on an individual. The theory of self-efficacy in qualitative research can further deepen our understanding of the relationship between experience type, and performance and skills.
- The sources of self-efficacy theory mentioned by Bandura (2001) are fourfold: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. However, there are sources that have been presented by some research such as that of the role-model (Korman *et al.*, 2022; Teane & Gombwe, 2023), also in this study results of participant responses are noted as experience, training, role models, emotional influence, and verbal effects. Therefore, the self-efficacy theory's sources can be expanded or replaced with new ones depending on the sample type, research questions, research recommendations, and literature reviews.
- Belief is a key factor in leadership self-efficacy according to the theory (Bandura, 1999), which supports the study's findings to differentiate and understand the role of high confidence in low leadership self-efficacy and high leadership self-efficacy, and that is also due to employing qualitative methodology. It is significant to understand how high confidence can support or hinder leaders.
- Investigating an organisation is one of the significant factors that influenced participants' leadership self-efficacy and support the research to know more about the leadership style as one of the managers' behavioral areas. Thus, it is suggested that exploring the behaviour for individuals' self-efficacy can be varied depending on the type of sample or type of organisation in question (Bandura,1999).

9.7. Limitations

This research aims to discover the leadership self-efficacy of Saudi women who work in academic leadership positions. It is a qualitative study that analyses eighteen semi-structured interviews. This methodology enhances the in-depth understanding of leadership self-efficacy and its factors (Ritchie et al., 2013; Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). However, it is not possible to generalise the findings of this type of methodology.

Therefore, the size and number of samples can be considered limitations that future research can work or springboard from. Additionally, the type of methodology, which explores the work culture from participants' views, limited exploring the relation between organisational structures (gender-segregated, women-only, mixed) and women's' beliefs, which clearly required further methods and a larger sample. However, this study has provided a deep understanding of the possible beliefs' women may have that can help future research investigations. In addition, most of the results that explained the training as one of the sources of self-efficacy were from the participants' own views; therefore, to obtain more important information about how organisations designed the courses to enhance self-efficacy, further research is needed to implement different methodologies, such as the use of mixed methods research. Furthermore, this study explained the organisational type and influence from participants perspectives' and thus cannot be generalised in terms of organisational structures or other factors that can influence employees' performance. Therefore, it suggested future research that can examine performance and leadership self-efficacy by employing other theories that adapt organisational models that support further explanations of the current results.

9.8. Research recommendations

“Science and its literature is a marvelous maze of data, arguments, biases, errors, and the greatest achievements of humans”. (Ioannidis, 2018)

According to Ioannidis (2018), research is one of humankind's most significant accomplishments. Therefore, this research provides recommendations for policymakers for empowering women in higher education.

Female close role-models:

In leadership roles, women face various challenges that may limit their ability to perceive their performance positively or to deal with difficulties (Nachatar Singh, 2022). However, this research has found that role models can enhance women's abilities in management. Close-type role models can help women ask questions, learn from them, and observe their ability to deal with challenges. Therefore, it suggests that universities employ an

internal policy that encourages women to work with role models before they are hired into their new managerial role.

Gender Competence:

Numerous studies have discussed sexism and stereotypes as barriers for women in leadership (Madsen & Longman, 2020). Moreover, this research indicates that sexism and stereotypes contribute to a low level of responsiveness in organisations. It is a level where individuals have difficulty managing and achieving their goals due to organisational challenges. Therefore, it is advisable for higher education institutions to establish a platform that encompasses both genders, ensuring equal access to training opportunities, including educating others about sexism and stereotypes. This type of opportunity can increase the level of organisational responsiveness, which in turn influences the performance of leaders.

Women's leadership styles:

Several scholars have argued that certain leadership styles can be more effective in achieving specific goals than others (Majid & Setyaningrum, 2022; Hussain & Hassan, 2016). For example, a transformational leadership style can drive change and high development, while a democratic leadership style does not necessarily achieve the same level of growth (Gülmez & Işık, 2020). However, the findings of this study have focused on how women have adapted leadership styles related to their specific organisation's culture. The study's findings suggest that organisations may restrict women's capacity to adopt specific leadership styles for organisational enhancement.

Therefore, this study suggests that organisations should reduce the obstacles leaders encounter when attempting to adapt their leadership styles, as this can lead to an increase in work efficiency. Furthermore, it suggested that higher education organisations offer training opportunities or seminars to develop leaders' knowledge of leadership styles.

Adhocracy in the organisation:

The study's findings indicate that bureaucracy poses a significant challenge for individuals in managing and developing their workplaces. Bureaucracy causes various issues by

lowering employee motivation and restricting leaders' ability to implement change. Accordingly, it is recommended that organisations should enhance adhocracy culture, which enhances flexibility and individuals' creativity by encouraging the development of new ideas and new initiatives (Khurosani, 2013). This new culture can have a positive influence on employee performance and enhance the positivity of the organisational culture.

Teamwork:

Issues around teamwork were one of the significant findings of this study. The study uncovered various aspects of teamwork, including social atmosphere, resistance, achievements, clarity, and communication conflicts. Teamwork can improve the quality of the work environment and efficiency. Therefore, I recommend that organisations improve this factor among employees and leaders through training sessions, clear work policies, and rewards.

9.9. Researcher's reflections

The journey has widened my understanding of the world that women live in. I thought that I knew women, but after conducting this research, I knew what it is that women may not be aware of. For example, stereotypes result from patriarchal culture and internal beliefs that can clearly enhance or hinder a woman's performance.

Moreover, my personal story guided me to ask many questions about women's performance in leadership, and I had different questions about who a woman in Saudi Arabia *before* Vision 2030 was, and *after* Vision 2030. That led me to discover this journey under employing the self-efficacy theory's perspectives and dimensions to explain what is happening today. A self-efficacy theory can explain one behaviour, from different dimensions. The theory has been presented in the third chapter (theoretical framework), explaining specifically how it has been employed in this research.

My findings expand my knowledge about women's self-beliefs. Women may refuse the stereotype, but in some way, they keep judging the failure of other female colleagues with regards to their gender, and this was one of the results in the eighth chapter in presenting

the characteristics of the unresponsive environment (Alhumaidhi, 2015). Stereotypes are being normalised as part of women's nature, security, culture, and even more by applying the authority of religion (Omair, 2019; Albawardi & Jones, 2023). All of those reasons enhance stereotypes against women, and on the surface seem to protect women and offer them a better life, according to Saudi culture (Havril, 2019). However, the truth is that she is going to invariably face this inner (negative) belief in her career, and when she needs to deal with her team of both genders (Bawazeer, 2015). Additionally, the challenge of genderism can be increased, especially if a woman does not realise the threats of stereotyping. All of these beliefs can threaten women's capability, affecting their leadership behaviour (Bawazeer, 2015; Herbst, 2020; Fritz & Van Knippenberg, 2018).

Furthermore, the sources of self-efficacy have increased my personal knowledge about their significance for one's personal development - understanding the in-depth experience, its type, challenges, opportunities, training, and role models in my life. In addition, daily feelings and word accumulation can influence me, so I need to raise my ability to deal with them.

Moreover, not all organisations can be positive and responsive; however, one's self-efficacy can be a main key to overcoming it or finding a better opportunity. Also, it is significant to know exactly what type of organisation I am working in, evaluate it, and find out the organisation's type to know exactly how I can contribute to it.

9.10. Future research

This section provides recommendations for researchers who are interested in conducting research on the leadership of Saudi women in higher education, leadership self-efficacy, and leadership styles. This study can provide several recommendations for future research, due to its limitations and findings.

In terms of limitations, as it has been mentioned this study is qualitative, which has investigated eighteen women who are heads of department or in dean roles. Therefore, future research can be done by employing quantitative methods with a larger sample to discover the resources for women, that lead them to adapt their current understanding of leadership. Additionally, according to the findings there was a clear relationship or link

between work culture and leadership styles, so it would be significant to discover the leadership styles in quantitative or qualitative methods from the views of employees. Furthermore, because this study focuses on a woman-only sample, the results included women who are in their role for first time due to Vision 2030 improvement, so it is suggested that it would be worthwhile conducting research which explores men's experiences with female leaders. Accordingly, it would be useful to expand the sample to include men and women, which might provide more understanding to the issue of sexism, with this being an issue that Vision 2030 aims to minimise. Moreover, the study's sample includes both deans and heads of departments, so it is recommended that future researchers might conduct a comparative study between deans' leadership styles and head of departments' leadership styles, in order to understand the factors that influence their managerial styles.

In terms of findings, the work culture has been analysed from participants' views, so future research might be done to understand how policymakers value the importance of improving the level of responsiveness in the workplace. Additionally, the study found that training is very important but has a poor role in influencing women's competencies. Therefore, part of the responsiveness of the organisational culture is to explore perceptions among policymakers in higher education in relation to the training's significance and its implementation.

Furthermore, as research focuses on women's findings, it was found that women may not have enough awareness about what stereotyping means, and its practice in manner and judgement. Therefore, it is important to search deeply and investigate what the stereotype means for Saudi women, when they normalise it, and when they do not. In addition, beliefs for women have been found that they are related to their performance; therefore, it is significant to conduct research to understand deeply how these beliefs have been constructed which may help understand the stereotype and level of self-efficacy.

Finally, in terms of research scarcity, this study has found that there is a lack of research on verbal and emotional influence and their impact on women's leadership; thus, it is recommended that research explores more of those sources. As Vision 2030 is one of

the latest aspects that drives the growth of higher education and women's status, it is recommended that there is a need to further explore the role of leadership self-efficacy in adapting to the changes occurring due to Vision 2030.

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11. Appendices

Appendix 1: Method Constructing (Semi-structured interview questions):

The method of this study was semi-structure interviews, based on using different various references to construct and improve the questions of the interviews. To explain: the first question was enhanced based on Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy theory (mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and psychological states) (Versland, 2016). The second research question was improved by employing the method of Hagan's (2021) study on women's self-efficacy in American universities. Furthermore, Alotaibi's (2020) findings were included in this study, which are connected to Saudi women's difficulties and empowerment. The research's third question was improved by combining techniques from many studies, including as that by Hagan and Olivier (2022). Furthermore, Bobbio and Manganelli (2009) analysed various LSE scales and determined the key components of effective leadership. Effective leaders possess a change-oriented mindset, the ability to select followers and delegate responsibilities, strong communication and interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, self-confidence, and motivation, and a strategic focus on achieving harmony and unity among teammates. Finally, the researcher used the findings of Alotaibi (2020) to develop the last section of the interview questions.

Form of interview question:

General information:

1. Could you tell me about your job and qualifications from undergraduate to now?

Questions:

A:

2. As a (Dean/Head department) Did you aspire to this role? why or why not?

3. As you may be aware, some organizations provide their employees with a variety of training opportunities relevant to their job: How can you locate training courses at your university or outside that are relevant to your leadership role?
4. How do you find the similarities between your former work experience and your current position?
5. Generally: How would you describe the work climate at a university?
6. As you know: Individuals are influenced by their workplace and organizational culture, especially the prevailing language and sentiments. What words come to mind when you think of the prevalent vocabulary heard in the workplace (grumbling, boredom, positive, excitement, disappointment, or others)?
7. How do you manage the workload and time for research, administration, and teaching? and what supports or impede your growth across these three dimensions?
8. In case the previous answers not including feeling:
9. What would you call the sensation you get about your workload, team reaction, and work environment if you were to describe it in one word?
Extra options: (a sense of fulfillment, complete confidence, anticipation, discomfort, distrust of the team or work environment, a sense of routine, a sense of difficulties in implementing a change in the work or in stuff)

B:

10. How do you differentiate between men's and women's leadership styles in the university?
11. how the university operates, in "two halves' section"?
12. how much autonomy you have in the female half, as well as a faculty or department head?
13. When it comes to decision-making, how do you find the balance of power between men and women? How do you feel about that?
14. How do you ensure that your plans and goals are being implemented, how do you manage your staff?
15. How do you implement change in your work, and what obstacles do you face? Could you provide an example?
16. How would you rate the effectiveness of communication at your college, team, or with men in your branch? how do you feel about it?
17. How does the university policy apply punishment and incentive? How do you use them in your job, and how do you feel about it?
18. What is your top three challenges that you might face if you make any changes or make new decisions? How do deal with them?

C:

19. What are the attractions to working in academia, perhaps in your field, and in this university? What are the downsides?

20. How do you think Vision 2030 might make a difference in Saudi Arabia, and particularly in higher education? What impact has it had so far, if any?
21. What are the barriers to implementing it in higher education, do you think?

Appendix 2: ethical approval, participant information sheet and consent form:



13th October 2021

Dear Salwa Alhalafi,

Thank you for submitting your ethics application and additional information for *'The Challenges and Opportunities on the Leadership Self-Efficacy of Saudi Women Academic Leaders'*. The information you provided has been reviewed by Dr Richard Budd and I can confirm that approval has been granted for this project.

As principal investigator your responsibilities include:

- ensuring that (where applicable) all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained;
- reporting any ethics-related issues that occur during the course of the research or arising from the research (e.g. unforeseen ethical issues, complaints about the conduct of the research, adverse reactions such as extreme distress) to the Research Ethics Officer (Dr Murat Oztok or Dr Natasa Lackovic).
- submitting details of proposed substantive amendments to the protocol to Dr Richard Budd (spvr) for approval.

Please do not hesitate to contact your supervisor if you require further information about this.

Kind regards,

Alison Sedgwick

Programme Administrator
Doctoral Programme in Educational Research

Head of Department
Professor Paul Ashwin, BA, MSc, PhD
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نموذج الموافقة

عنوان البحث: تجربة القيادة الأكاديمية السعودية في التعليم الطبي (التحديات و الفرص) وتأثيرها على القدرة الذاتية للقيادة
Research title: The Effects of Challenges and Opportunities on the Leadership Self-Efficacy of Saudi Women Academic Leaders

اسم الباحث: سألوا المحلاني S.alhala@lancaster.ac.uk
 Email (البريد الإلكتروني): S.alhala@lancaster.ac.uk

Please read the following carefully:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
 أتأكد أنني قرأت وفهمت ورقة المعلومات للدراسة المذكورة أعلاه وقد أجبت في الفرصة لتطرح في المعلومات وطرح الأسئلة والإجابة عليها بشكل مرضي.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within (6 weeks) of commencement of the study my data will be removed.
 أعلم أن مشاركتي طوعية وأني حر في الانسحاب في أي وقت، دون إبداء أي سبب. وإذا كنت قد انسحبت خلال (6 أسابيع) من بدء الدراسة، فسيتم إزالة بياناتي.
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researcher, but my personal information will not be included, and I will not be identifiable.
 أن أي معلومات قد أعطاها لي يمكن استخدامها في التقارير المستقبلية أو المقالات الأكاديمية أو المنشورات أو العروض التقديمية من قبل الباحث/العرض التقديمية، ولكن أن بياناتي الشخصية لن يتم التعرف على.
4. I understand that my name/my organisation's name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation without my consent.
 أن اسم المؤسسة لن يظهر في أي تقارير أو مقالات أو عروض تقديمية دون موافقتي.
5. I understand that any interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed, and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.
 أعلم أن أي مقابلات سيتم تسجيلها صوتياً وتسجيلها، وأن البيانات ستكون محفوظة على الأجهزة المشفرة وأني آمن.
6. I understand that data will be kept according to university guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.
 أن البيانات ستبقى وفقاً لتعليمات الجامعة لمدة لا تقل عن 10 سنوات بعد نهاية الدراسة.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.
 أوافق على المشاركة في الدراسة المذكورة أعلاه.

Name of participant (–):	Date (تاريخ):	Signature (توقيع):

v27-6-16

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

أؤكد أن المشاركون قد أُجيبوا على أسئلة حول الدراسة، وقد تمت الإجابة على جميع الأسئلة التي طرحها المشاركون بشكل صحيح. أؤكد أن الفرد لم يجبر على إعطاء الموافقة، وأن الموافقة قد أُعطيت له بحرية وبطوعية.

Signature of Researcher/person taking the consent

التوقيع (اسم الباحث/شخص الموافقة):

Date (تاريخ): _____ DDMMYYYY

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

v27-6-16



Participant information sheet

The Effects of Challenges and Opportunities on the Leadership Self-Efficacy of Saudi Women Academic Leaders

I am Salva Alhalafi a PhD student at Lancaster University, and I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about the challenges and opportunities in your workplace and how that have an impact on leadership self-efficacy

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

This study aims to explore your experience as Saudi women in higher education.

I have approached you because I am interested in understanding what academic women in leadership positions might face in their workplace and how that might have effects on themselves and their work. I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

If you decided to take part, this would involve the following: I will schedule a meeting with you whenever you desire to conduct an individual interview. It will last from 45 to 60 minutes, and the questions will cover a variety of topics related to your experience as a leader, including the impact of Vision 2030 and the position of women in Saudi Arabian higher education.

Participating in this study will enable you to discuss your personal experiences at work. Your insights will undoubtedly contribute to our understanding of the nature of higher education institutions. This may benefit the higher education area by enriching it and providing recommendations that may be beneficial to higher education institutions. It is entirely up to you whether or not you participate. Your participation is entirely voluntary. This will have no effect on your position at work or your relationship with your colleagues. Additionally, your information will be entirely anonymous.

If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time during your participation in this study. If you want to withdraw, please let me know, and I will extract any ideas or information (-data) you contributed to the study and destroy them. However, it is difficult and often impossible to take out data from one specific participant when this has already been anonymised or pooled together with other people's data. Therefore, you can only withdraw up to 6 weeks after taking part in the study.

While it is not expected that the topics under discussion will be unpleasant, you should refrain from participating if you are likely to find this topic uncomfortable to discuss. Although

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there are unlikely to be any significant drawbacks to taking part in this interview, you will need to set up 45-60 minutes to share your story. Only I, the researcher conducting this study, will have opinions you share with me after the interview.

I will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is I will not share it with others. I will remove any personal information from the written record of your contribution. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project. I will use the information you have shared with me only in the following ways: I will use it for research purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and other publications, for example journal articles. I may also present the results of my study at academic conferences

When writing up the findings from this study, I would like to reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. I will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from my interview with you), so that although I will use your exact words, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect your anonymity in our publications.

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers. I will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office. I will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic). In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact myself. Salva Alhalafi: S.alhalafi@lancaster.ac.uk Supervisor: Dr. Richard Budd: r.budd@lancaster.ac.uk

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact: Head of Department name: Professor Paul Ashwin Lancaster University email address: paul.ashwin@lancaster.ac.uk

For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage: www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection

Thank you for considering your participation in this project.

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