

# ARTICLE CRITIQUE

## AN ANALYSIS OF LEARNING BARRIERS: THE SAUDI ARABIAN CONTEXT

[Khan, Intakhab. (2011). International Education Studies, 4, 242-247.]

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**I**n his article "An analysis of Learning Barriers: The Saudi Arabian Context" (2011), Intakhab Khan discusses the relationship between the learning and teaching processes, and the barriers that contribute to unsuccessful learning. Some barriers have a strong impact, such as social and motivational barriers. The article explains teachers' characteristics, and the role of teachers in stimulating their students' motivation in order to develop the processes of learning and teaching. Teachers need good preparation and a commitment towards their jobs to become professionals. The article describes the educational situation in Saudi Arabia - students face some barriers and exhibit a lack of motivation, and most teachers are not well equipped to teach, needing some training before embarking on a teaching career. While the article describes the barriers in very general terms, it fails when it applies - without evidence - the generalized judgments to the situation in Saudi education.

Khan presents interesting information about learning barriers (as well as other factors) that have a strong impact on the

learning process, and he cites very good sources of linguists and writers supporting the general idea about barriers found anywhere around the world. He fails, however, to use any source or investigation related to the case of Saudi education. Khan does not mention any statistics to support his claim or strengthen his case. Instead, he bases his judgement on his own experience as an assistant professor at King Abdulaziz University from 2008, referencing his own students; he does not refer to any formal studies by either himself or other researchers. For example, in his article he describes the attitude of Saudi students and teachers as follows: "It has been found that

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neither teachers nor students are properly motivated towards educational goals". However, he concedes that "exceptional cases exist". This means that the general (or default) situation in Saudi Arabia is a lack of motivation. Another generalization is that "Saudi students are negatively affected by scheduling issues". It is illogical to provide information without citing credible sources to support the

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ideas; however, Khan never discloses how he acquired this information, or how he came to these conclusions.

Some teachers do not have a passion for teaching, and only do it for the salary and benefits. Khan discusses this dangerous situation, which may lead to negative effects for the students. He writes: "If a teacher is in a teaching profession just by chance, he won't be able to serve the learner community as he should. It is simply because of the reason that, to him, teaching is just a means of earning livelihood - an occupation". Then Khan criticizes the level of efficiency of teachers in Saudi Arabia: "Most of the teachers in Saudi (local or international) are not found well prepared, while going for teaching, as they have no ready lesson plans or even schemes of work(sow)". Khan once again offers a generalization by using the word "most", but the situation is probably not the same everywhere in the kingdom. The Ministry of Education in Saudi has laid down very strict criteria for teaching. The National Center for Assessment (QIYAS) administers special tests meeting specific standards that graduates need to pass in order to be eligible for a teaching job. Another requirement is the Diploma of Education, which is a prerequisite for those intending entering the teaching profession.

As society plays an important role in the development of the learning process, Khan writes about the social barriers in general - and the social responsibilities for Saudi students in particular - which stand as obstacles in Saudi students' educational way. The article claims that "The parents, especially fathers, in Saudi are not much worried about their children's education or future career". If that were true, we would not see

full schools everywhere in Saudi Arabia, some students travelling long distances and most being actively supported by parents. In Saudi Arabia, there are 33 universities, of which 24 are public and 9 are private. This number will increase in the coming years. Also, 70,000 Saudi students were sent to different countries around the world as part of the King Abdullah Foreign Scholarship Program. "The program seeks to accommodate thousands of graduates from secondary school and university to study abroad in a variety of specializations in accordance with the national needs of the local, regional and international economic trends of labor market" (Ministry of Education). If there were no encouragement from the families of those students, or if social responsibilities prohibited them, would they have had the ambition to complete their education? These facts confirm that neither students' parents nor social responsibilities can prevent them from gaining knowledge.

Khan, in his article, uses numerous generalizations without any evidence to support his allegations. The majority of Saudi students and teachers do not have a negative attitude toward learning, and education would not have developed during the years of establishing new universities with a huge number of students. The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia puts a premium on the preparation for new teachers before hiring them. Social barriers do not hamper education in Saudi Arabia, and a large number of students are studying both at home and abroad.

#### Reference

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