



## Perceptions and Experiences of International Faculty Members in Saudi Arabia

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### Abstract

The current study has designed to examine the cultural adjustment experiences of international faculty members working in Saudi Arabia. Such insight is important because researchers have largely ignored Saudi Arabia when exploring cultural diversity in the modern workplace. The study examined the cross-cultural perceptions of international faculty members employed in King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The study also aimed to establish a relationship between selected demographic characteristics (gender, marital status, and country of origin) and successful cultural adjustment. The results of the study showed that international faculty members at King Abdulaziz University had a moderate level of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and cultural adjustment. In addition, participants had not experienced a high level of discrimination. The study also found that female participants had a higher level of cultural adjustment than male participants. In addition, there was no significant difference in international faculty members' cultural adjustments based on their marital status and country of origin.

**Keywords:** Cultural diversity; Saudi Arabia; International faculty; Adjustment.

### 1. Introduction

Along with many other countries, Saudi Arabia has recently experienced increased cultural diversity in the workplace. Among a total estimated population of 30 million inhabitants, the kingdom currently has approximately 10 million immigrants living within its borders (Arab News, 2013; Edgar, Azhar & Duncan, 2016). To replenish its workforce, Saudi Arabia welcomes legal immigrants and temporary residents from other countries seeking educational and employment opportunities. As a result of this open immigration policy, Al-Asfour and Khan (2013) report that more than 60% of the national workforce is now composed of non-Saudis. (The vast majority of foreign-born adults living in Saudi Arabia are employed.) Given this influx, successful Saudi business organizations and educational institutions must accommodate a wide diversity of employees (Pieterse, Knippenberg, & Dierendonck, 2010).

Accompanying this trend is the rising potential for cultural clashes in the workplace. Showail, Parks, and Smith (2013) emphasized that foreign workers in Saudi Arabia, along with their families, often experience difficulty adapting to established cultural practices. Such cultural challenges are often seen in higher education, one of the most diverse sectors in the economy. While international faculty members are desired and becoming more prevalent, many of these university employees cannot successfully adjust to the societal standards of Saudi life. As

a result of such cultural incompatibility, these educators and researchers may struggle to perform work duties to the best of their ability.

## 2. Rationale for the Study

As universities in Saudi Arabia recruit more international faculty members, they must create personnel policies and professional development opportunities that attract these individuals. This study would help education administrators and policy makers understand the cultural expectations of international faculty members—and how such expectations could clash with traditional Saudi societal beliefs and practices. This analysis has highlighted current strengths and weaknesses regarding cross-cultural integration. Such insight would allow officials to improve cultural experiences and professional rewards for international faculty members. Study findings would also heighten awareness among foreign academics of potential cultural challenges before they decide whether to accept a university position. Finally, this study would encourage future research to further explore issues of workplace diversity within Saudi Arabia as the country increasingly seeks the benefits of globalization.

## 3. Research Questions

- 1- What are the experiences of cultural adjustments among international faculty members working at King Abdulaziz University?
- 2- How do personal or demographic characteristics impact the cultural adjustment of international faculty members?
  - a) How does a faculty member's gender impact their cultural adjustment?
  - b) How does a faculty member's marital status impact their cultural adjustment?
  - c) How does a faculty member's country of origin impact their cultural adjustment?
- 3- What are the barriers to successful adaptation for international faculty members in Saudi Arabia?

## 4. Literature Review

### 4.1 What is Cultural Diversity?

Although the term cultural diversity is used with increasing frequency in many parts of the world, confusion remains about what the term means. The lack of a broadly accepted definition for the term culture could contribute to this lack of understanding. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 6). Jameson (2007), on the other hand, suggested that culture is “the coherent, learned, shared view of a group of people about life's concerns that ranks what is important, furnishes attitudes about what things are appropriate, and dictates behavior” (Jameson, 2007, p. 6). However, the parameters of cultural diversity remain a topic of scholarly disagreement.

### 4.2 Cultural Diversity in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is considered the spiritual home of Islam, with the two holiest Islamic sites (Mecca and Medina) located within its national borders. Because of this religious centrality, Saudi Arabia exerts considerable moral and political influence over other Arab nations, as well as Muslims worldwide. Saudi Arabia is also a major economic force in the Middle East, possessing the world's second largest oil reserves.

Work-related immigration to Saudi Arabia began in earnest in the late 1930s with the arrival of foreign experts in oil exploration. The influx of skilled laborers increased after 1973 when the Saudi oil boom fueled widespread economic expansion and infrastructure development (Pakkiasamy, 2004).

Among a total estimated population of 30 million inhabitants, the kingdom currently has approximately 10 million immigrants living within its borders (Arab News, 2013; Edgar, Azhar & Duncan, 2016). Al-Asfour and Khan (2013) report that more than 60% of the national workforce is now composed of non-Saudis.

### 4.3 International Faculty Members in Saudi Arabia

Universities around the world seek international faculty members to maintain an academic environment that enriches from a diverse workplace. Universities also hire such individuals to overcome a shortage of qualified local applicants (Bhuiyan, Al-shammari, & Jefri, 2001; Kim, Twombly & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). As a result of this practice, college students have the opportunity to learn from people with vastly different backgrounds from their own. Kim et al. (2015) claimed that institutions of higher education hire international faculty to advance their own

best interest, seeing this as a means to boost overall educational excellence. Some researchers described these universities as investors; by obtaining quality faculty from abroad they are creating the instructional infrastructure to produce knowledgeable and qualified students (Adeeba, Ibrahim, Muenjohn & Saber, 2015). According to the Ministry of Higher Education (2014), international faculty members at Saudi Arabian universities, work under an institute-specific contract detailing employment rules and regulations. Of the current total of 73,817 university faculty in the country, 31,394 (42.5%) are from other countries. Most international faculty members (26,471) work at public universities.

## 5. Research Methodology

This study utilized a cross-sectional design and a quantitative method approach to explore cultural perceptions of international university faculty members working in Saudi Arabia. This study used the Qualtrics survey software to administer the questionnaire. This tool provides an easy, inexpensive, efficient, and confidential means to conduct quantitative research. Also, an online survey is appropriate given the study population which is highly educated. The collected data were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS software.

### 5.1 Sample

This study used a purposeful sample, a useful strategy when researchers desire to identify specific characteristics among participants. The study utilized a non-probabilistic sample. Sample criteria included: (a) current full-time employment as an international faculty member at the designated Saudi Arabian university, and (b) at least one year at the academic position. While the specific target population for this study was international faculty members working in Saudi Arabia, the accessible population was international faculty at King Abdulaziz University (KAU). Established in 1967 and named after the country's founder, KAU is a national university focused on providing academic excellence in the western region of Saudi Arabia. In accordance with Islamic principles, the university has gender-specific campuses for male and female students and instructors (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016).

### 5.2 Variables/Instrumentation

For the purpose of this study, data were collected using a survey adapted from previous studies (Rutherford et al, 2009; Black et al, 1989 and Sanchez & Brock, 1996). The research instrument included 34 questions divided into three sections. The first section of the survey explored successful adjustment and was measured using four constructs: (1) job satisfaction; (2) organizational commitment; (3) adjustment and (4) perceived discrimination. International faculty members were questioned about their degree of job satisfaction and organizational commitment using a 7-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree (Rutherford et al, 2009). Faculty members were questioned about their degree of adjustment to Saudi Arabian society using a separate 7-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 = very unadjusted to 7 = very adjusted (Black et al, 1989). Perceived discrimination was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree (Sanchez & Brock, 1996).

The second survey section included demographic questions such as age, gender, marital status, and country of origin. The third survey section consisted of three open-ended questions intended to elicit further information about the cross-cultural perceptions and experiences of these international faculty members.

### 5.3 Data Analysis and results

The participants of this study were described according to gender, religion, marital status, age, country of origin, living status, and number of years at King Abdulaziz University. The data reveal that of 110 participants, males were the largest group of participants (72.7%, N=80) which is consistent with the percentage of male international faculty members working at King Abdulaziz University, while females constituted 27.3%. The majority (95.5%, N=105) of the international faculty members were Muslims, while less than 5% of the participants were non-Muslims. In terms of marital status, a large number of the international faculty members reported they were married with family living with them in Saudi Arabia (70.9%), while 19.1% of the participants were married with no family members living in Saudi Arabia and 6.4% reported being single. Participants represented 22 different countries. The most frequent country of origin reported by the respondents was Egypt with 45 participants (40.9%). The two next most frequently reported nationalities were India with 12 participants (10.9%) and Pakistan, with 11 participants (10%). Fourteen participants were from western countries (United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Armenia and Canada). The remaining participants were from Jordan, Tunisia, Bangladesh, Morocco, Algeria, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sudan, Turkey, South Africa, Yemen and Uzbekistan. For aggregation purposes, countries were clustered into four groups: Egypt, Western countries, Asian countries, and African countries.

The first research question asked what are the experiences of cultural adjustment among international faculty members working at Saudi Arabian universities. Descriptive statistics were conducted to evaluate the overall experiences of cultural adjustment by exploring four constructs: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, cultural adjustment, and perceived discrimination. The first construct is job satisfaction; participants were questioned about their degree of job satisfaction using a 7-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree (Rutherford et al, 2009). The means ranged from 5.43 to 5.77 out of 7. The highest mean was for the statement “my job is worthwhile” ( $M=5.77$ ,  $SD=1.457$ ). The lowest mean was for the statement “my job is exciting” ( $M=5.43$ ,  $SD=1.462$ ). All responses had means above 5. These results showed that international faculty members at King Abdulaziz University had a high level of job satisfaction.

The second construct is organizational commitment; participants were questioned about their degree of organizational commitment using a 7-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The means ranged from 4.84 to 5.07 out of 7. The highest mean was for the statement “in my job I find that my values and organization’s values are similar” ( $M=5.07$ ,  $SD=1.811$ ).

The third construct is cultural adjustment; participants were questioned about their degree of adjustment to Saudi Arabian society using 7-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 = very unadjusted to 7 = very adjusted (Black et al, 1989). The means ranged from 3.91 to 6.15 out of 7. The highest mean was for the items “shopping adjustment” ( $M=6.15$ ,  $SD=.776$ ). The lowest mean was for the item “entertainment adjustment” ( $M=3.91$ ,  $SD=1.774$ ).

The fourth construct is perceived discrimination; it was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree (Sanchez & Brock, 1996). The means ranged from 2.45 to 2.94 out of 5. The highest mean was for the statement “at work, I sometimes feel that my ethnicity is a limitation” ( $M=2.94$ ,  $SD=1.329$ ). The lowest mean was for the statement “at work, I sometimes feel that people actively try to stop me from advancing because of my ethnic origin” ( $M=2.45$ ,  $SD=1.339$ ). All responses had means below 3. The results indicated that international faculty members at King Abdulaziz University had not experienced a high level of discrimination. Table 5.1 summarizes these results.

The second research question examined the impact of demographic characteristics of international faculty members at King Abdulaziz University on their cultural adjustment. The researcher aimed to examine the influence of three selected personal characteristics (gender, marital status, and country of origin).

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether or not there was statistically significant differences among international faculty members’ cultural adaptations at King Abdulaziz University based on gender. As can be seen in Table 5.2, the t-test results reveal that there was a significant statistical difference between male and female in terms of their level of cultural adjustment. Female participants ( $M=5.7500$ ,  $SD=.79046$ ) had a higher mean than male participants ( $M=4.9366$ ,  $SD=1.16119$ ). The results show that the mean difference was significant,  $t(76.530) = -4.190$ ,  $p=.000$ . Therefore, female participants had a higher level of cultural adjustment than male participants.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test differences among the following groups measuring faculty marital status: single, married with family, married with no family. Table 5.3, below shows the results of the group statistics for participants’ cultural adjustment based on marital status. The mean value for participants who were single was the highest ( $M=5.4026$ ,  $SD=.86854$ ) while the mean value for participants who were married without family or family at home country was the lowest ( $M=5.0748$ ,  $SD=.91095$ ).

However, the difference in means was not statistically significant,  $F(2,107) = 315$ ,  $p=.731$ . Accordingly, the results indicated that there was no significant difference in international faculty members’ cultural adjustments based on their marital status.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test the influence of country of origin on cultural adaptation among international faculty members at King Abdulaziz University. As can be seen in Table 5.4, the results revealed the group statistics for participants’ cultural adjustment based on country of origin. The mean value for participants who were from Egypt was the highest ( $M=5.4001$ ,  $SD=.100455$ ) while the mean value for participants who were from African countries was the lowest ( $M=4.8793$ ,  $SD=1.24420$ ).

However, as shown in Table 5.5, there was no significant difference in the cultural adjustment based on country of origin,  $F(3,106) = .951$ ,  $p=.419$ .

**Table 5.1**  
**Descriptive Statistics for Cultural Adjustments for International Faculty Members (N=110)**

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Job Satisfaction</b>	110	1	7	5.59	1.34
A sense of accomplishment	110	1	7	5.64	1.46
Exciting	110	1	7	5.43	1.46
Satisfying	110	1	7	5.54	1.54
Worthwhile	110	1	7	5.77	1.45
<b>Organizational Commitment</b>	110	1	7	4.92	1.71
Values are similar	110	1	7	5.07	1.81
Inspires the very best in me	110	1	7	4.84	1.89
The best of all possible organizations	110	1	7	4.84	1.86
<b>Cultural Adjustment</b>	110	2	7	5.16	1.12
In General	110	1	7	5.35	1.51
Housing	110	1	7	5.02	1.58
Food	110	3	7	6.04	.938
Shopping	110	3	7	6.15	.776
Cost of Living	110	1	7	4.95	1.62
Entertainment	110	1	7	3.91	1.77
Health Care	110	1	7	4.63	1.81
Socializing	110	1	7	4.73	1.79
Interacting on a day-to-day basis	110	1	7	5.14	1.68
Interacting Outside of work	110	1	7	4.41	1.77
Speaking with Saudis	110	1	7	4.98	1.70
Job Responsibilities	110	1	7	5.85	1.35
Performance Standards	110	1	7	5.62	1.49
Supervisory Responsibilities	110	1	7	5.45	1.48
<b>Perceived Discrimination</b>	110	1	7	2.71	1.21
Ethnicity is a limitation	110	1	7	2.94	1.32
People try to stop me from advancing	110	1	7	2.54	1.33
Do not get enough recognition	110	1	7	2.67	1.44

**Table 5.2**

**Descriptive T-test for Cultural Adjustment by Gender (N=110)**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Significance
Cultural Adjustment	Male	80	4.9366	1.16119	.12982	***
	Female	30	5.7500	.79046	.14432	

Note: \*\*\*= p<.001

**Table 5.3**

**Descriptive Statistics for Cultural Adjustment by Marital Status (N=110)**

	N	M	SD	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Single	11	5.4026	.86854	.26187	4.8191	5.9861	3.79	6.21
Married with family	78	5.1465	1.21741	.13784	4.8720	5.4210	2.00	7.00
Married without family	21	5.0748	.91095	.19879	4.6602	5.4895	2.57	6.36
Total	110	5.1584	1.12957	.10770	4.9450	5.3719	2.00	7.00

**Table 5.4**

**Descriptive Statistics for Culture Adjustment by Country of Origin (N=110)**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Egypt	45	5.4001	1.00455	.14975	5.0983	5.7019	2.10	6.86
Western Countries	13	5.1258	1.75540	.48686	4.0650	6.1865	1.90	7.00
Asian Countries	33	5.1437	1.07239	.18668	4.7634	5.5240	2.30	6.73
African Countries	19	4.8793	1.24420	.28544	4.2796	5.4790	1.89	6.53
Total	110	5.2008	1.17300	.11184	4.9791	5.4225	1.89	7.00

**Table 5.5**

**Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Cultural Adjustment by Country of Origin (N=110)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.932	3	1.311	.951	.419
Within Groups	146.04	106	1.378		
Total	149.97	109			

The third section of the survey consisted of three open-ended questions which intended to elicit further information about the cross-cultural perceptions and experiences of international faculty members. These questions also allowed participants to express opinions about any topic not included in the closed-ended questions earlier in the survey. In addition, this section aimed to answer the third research question: What are barriers to successful adaptation for international faculty members in Saudi Arabia?

Separate methods were used to analyze the responses to these questions about faculty adaptation experiences. The researcher used structural steps to categorize and code responses, creating a taxonomy of themes derived from initial data analysis (Neuman, 2011). This step facilitated the process of data reduction and deconstruction.

The themes and subthemes that evolved from all participant responses were grouped in two sections: (1) themes for international faculty members' experiences at King Abdulaziz University (KAU), (2) themes for challenges of living in Saudi Arabia.

## **First: Themes for International Faculty Members' Experiences at KAU**

### ***Theme 1: Initial challenges***

#### *Sub-themes: Language barriers and poor guidance*

Study participants stated they faced the most adjustment challenges during their early days in Saudi Arabia. Among their experiences:

- “In the beginning I found it a bit challenging but now I’m quite comfortable.”
- “It was a bit tough in the start, but it didn’t last long.” A male participant from Egypt stated.
- “It is not easy at the beginning, as you try to understand your surroundings and try to know the best way to adapt. Today, I am well-grounded and grateful for the kind people around me who helped me to adjust.” A female participant in her 40s responded.
- “An international faculty member needs the help of someone to meet his/her basic requirements for a long time when they initially arrive. The life is very hard out of the university campus.” A male participant in his 50s wrote.

Language barriers were a common obstacle faced by international faculty members. (Some of whom could only speak English upon relocating to Saudi Arabia.) Their survey responses included:

- “The first year was very difficult as far as completing the required paperwork, etc. When I joined KAU, there were no English-speaking staff members in HR and my Arabic wasn’t good enough to communicate well.”
- “People at H.R. didn’t speak much English when I came so it wasn’t easy doing the paperwork.” A female participant from India wrote.
- “Almost all forms and procedures in the university are in Arabic. So, it becomes very difficult to get through. For example, if I want to apply for conference attendance, I have to fill up the form in Arabic which is not possible for me without someone’s help.”

Some international faculty members encountered a troubling lack of guidance and information upon arriving at King Abdulaziz University. One participant from United Kingdom wrote: “There was no organized orientation when I started—which I feel is unacceptable and showed a lack of consideration.” A male faculty member in his 40s stated: “Difficult. No proper guidance and procedures on many things. Procedures keep changing and was not properly informed before the implementation. Main online systems are in native language. Felt left out because of language barrier.”

### ***Theme 2: Successful experiences***

#### *Subthemes: Shared culture and religion, recognition of hard work, and support by the university and colleagues*

A second theme—successful experiences—emerged from responses to the first open-ended question. Many non-Saudi Muslim faculty had few problems adjusting to a country with similar cultural and religious practices as their own. “I didn’t have to face big challenges due to my own background which is not too different from that of my workplace,” said one participant from India. “Meeting people from different nationalities was a wonderful



experience.” Another individual wrote: “Culturally, it hasn’t been a big adjustment since most stakeholders are Muslim and we tend to share some cultural norms.”

Many of these international faculty also adjusted well to campus life. For example: a female participant from Jordan stated “It went smooth as most Arab countries share quite similar ethics, customs, lifestyle and traditions.” Another participant responded: “As a Muslim, it is not so difficult to adapt.” For some faculty, the fact that their hard work was recognized by supervisors made it easier to adapt. “Hard work and dedication is rewarded,” an Egyptian participant wrote. Similar responses included: “The university does consider our work and efforts” and “It’s an interesting and rewarding place to work.”

Many participants mentioned the positive impact of colleagues and friends on their adaptation process. Among the responses:

- “We are good colleagues.”
- “Most of the colleagues are very helpful and considerate.”
- “It was really a fruitful experience. Although teachers are from different nationalities, I didn’t face any difficulty when coping with them.”
- “I really adapt well. I have a lot of friends. I love Saudi food. I am often invited to Saudi gatherings.”
- “Having teachers’ parties at work. Attending formal celebrations. Participating in my colleagues’ weddings and delivery occasions.”
- “It’s great place to work. People around me are friendly, caring and very cooperative.”

A supportive supervisor also contributed to a successful experience for faculty. As male participant in his 50s stated: “I was lucky with my direct boss. He was highly motivating and inspired me to give my best effort. He was very smart and clever to understand each of his employees both in terms of personal capacity and psychological profile. To work in a comfortable working environment in Saudi Arabia, I believe it is extremely dependent on the type and the character of your director and how motivated and open minded he is. Actually, I was a lucky one to work with this excellent boss.”

### ***Theme 3: Bad experiences***

*Subthemes: Limited opportunities and university bureaucracy*

Some study participants indicated that they did not adapt well to their new campus environment. A variety of reasons were given, with problems most commonly centered around limited professional opportunities and the university bureaucracy. In terms of career advancement, a female participant in her 30s stated: “It’s difficult being a non-Saudi because I can’t move up the ladder even with a lot of experience. People with higher positions are all Saudis.” One participant from United States wrote: “As an international faculty member, you need to know your limitations.” The university bureaucracy could also be problematic, a non-Muslim participant wrote: “I’m still adapting because of indefinite policies and work conditions.” Another stated “The bureaucracy is confusing and very frustrating.”

## **Second: Themes for Challenges of Living in Saudi Arabia**

### ***Theme 1: Family concerns***

*Subthemes: Adjustment and education of children and family responsibilities*

When international faculty members were asked about the challenges of living in Saudi Arabia, three major themes emerged. The first theme was *family concerns*. Most participants agreed that providing a quality education for their children was among the biggest challenges of adapting to Saudi Arabia. As one participant from Tunisia wrote: “My kid’s education and my family depend a lot on me.” There was particular concern regarding higher education opportunities.

Among the responses on this topic:

- “One of the major challenges is to provide higher education for our children.”
- “There is no provision for higher studies of my children in Saudi Arabia.”
- “Affordable quality education for our dependents—opportunities for foreign nationals to do an MA or PHD locally.”
- “The biggest obstacle I ever faced was my children education.”

The second subtheme that emerged centered on non-educational family responsibilities. Several participants noted that being married and having family obligations increased the challenges of living in Saudi Arabia. One female study participant wrote of “bearing the family expenses all alone as my husband is jobless and under visa work restrictions too.” Another faculty member mentioned the difficulty in finding “the balance between job responsibilities and family responsibilities.” Other participants spoke of having family members who do not live with them in Saudi Arabia and the obligation to visit them whenever possible. Arranging this travel is sometimes difficult. One participant wrote: “We need clear dates concerning vacations. A lot of people live here alone and they need to see their families and sometimes it is not made clear whether vacations are official or not.”

### ***Theme 2: Adjustment difficulties***

*Subthemes: Weather, transportation, language, and socialization*

For the second theme, *adjustment difficulties*, four subthemes emerged. Many participants said it was difficult to adjust to the weather in Saudi Arabia. Another major challenge was transportation. One participant wrote “I wish there was decent public transportation.” Another stated: “Transportation—as it is VERY hard to find reliable drivers.” A third adjustment difficulty was the language barrier. “The language is an obstacle, and opportunities to learn it are somewhat limited,” one participant wrote.” Another stated: “I cannot speak Arabic, so I may miss a lot of opportunities.” One participant from Pakistan wrote “Learn local language, the moment you step in the airport, you need to speak Arabic.”

A final common challenge was adjusting to the different culture in Saudi Arabia. In particular, many international faculty experienced difficult social interactions. Examples of difficulties included:

- “Coping with the Saudi nature and culture.”
- “Adapting to their customs.”
- “The biggest challenge is the limitation in socialization. This is particularly difficult for women.”
- “Limited opportunities for social activities.”

### ***Theme 3: Social integration***

*Subtheme: Discrimination beyond campus*

The final theme that emerged for daily living challenges was *social integration*. Some international faculty members experienced social discrimination when they ventured beyond the campus environment. One study participant wrote: “Within campus I mixed well with Saudis. We respect each other. They are very nice people. Maybe because we know each other. But outside campus, we are not treated well. Big gap between Saudis and Non-Saudis.” Another participant stated that “integrating with locals & facing discrimination” was a significant problem. According to survey results, this discrimination against foreigners often came from poorly educated Saudi citizens. One participant wrote: “Very limited difference in social cultures but it was tolerable and acceptable to me. Some Saudi people, especially uneducated, who cannot understand or be tolerant with such differences behave in ways considered as discrimination.”

## **6. Conclusion**

With the increase of international employees in Saudi Arabia, better information is needed about their cultural adjustment successes and challenges. There is currently a lack of scholarly research on this topic, particularly regarding higher education workplace dynamics. (Most prior studies have focused on foreign employees in business settings.)

This study, examined the experiences of foreign faculty members who relocated from 22 different countries, makes several important contributions to cross-cultural understanding. First, the study explored the adjustment

experiences, including expectations and problems, faced by these individuals working at a major Saudi Arabian university. Second, the research clarified the relative—and sometimes surprising—influence of gender, marital status, and country of origin on cultural adjustment.

Taken together, this quantitative data indicate that faculty members as a whole experienced moderately successful cultural adjustment after moving to Saudi. There was a statistically significant difference based on gender, with female faculty enjoying greater cultural adaptation. Conversely, the demographic characteristics of marital status and country of origin had no measurable impact on adjustment to Saudi society. To supplement the above research, the open-ended survey questions allowed international faculty to add additional comments regarding their adaptation experiences. Based on this qualitative data, the analysis developed and explored themes and sub-themes related to working and living in Saudi Arabia.

Study findings will benefit both international faculty members already living in Saudi as well as foreigners considering relocating to the country. Saudi education officials, some of whom may be unaware of the impact of relocating (particularly from a very different culture), can also glean valuable information. It is only via research, both with the current study and those that follow, that more insightful and beneficial policies and practices can be developed to improve the cultural integration experience of working professionals arriving from abroad.

## 7. Recommendations for Future Studies

- Additional studies can focus on obtaining detailed information about the experiences of international faculty members working at other universities in Saudi Arabia.
- Future research can determine the influence of demographic characteristics other than the three examined in the current study—gender, marital status, and country of origin. For example, researchers could look at how participants' religion, age, and length of stay in the host country impacts cultural adaptation.
- Future studies could interview the spouses of international faculty members as well. Such interviews might provide different perspectives on the expatriate experience, whether in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere.

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