

## Negotiating Leadership Identity: Middel Eastren Female Students' Experiences with Western Leadership Pedagogy

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### **Abstract:**

This study examines the impact of implementing Western leadership pedagogy—drawing on textbooks and theories originally developed within Western sociocultural contexts—on Middel Eastren female students enrolled in a leadership course at a private university in Saudi Arabia. Although the curriculum relied heavily on established Western leadership frameworks, instructors intentionally incorporated local leaders and culturally relevant examples to make the material more authentic and aligned with students' lived experiences. Guided by Social Identity Theory, the study explores how students negotiate their leadership identities when they encounter theoretical perspectives that do not fully reflect their cultural backgrounds. A phenomenological approach was used to investigate how students interpret leadership concepts, construct meaning from them, and integrate these understandings into their self-perceptions. Semi-structured interviews conducted after the completion of the course revealed that students generally expressed strong confidence in their leadership abilities, consistently attributing this confidence to the inclusion of familiar, local leadership models used during instruction. These findings indicate that contextualizing Western theories with culturally grounded examples can to some extent enhance students' sense of relevance, authenticity, and personal connection to the material. The study contributes to the literature on culturally responsive leadership education by demonstrating that localized pedagogy can effectively bridge gaps between global leadership theories and the identities of students in non-Western contexts. This suggests that when culturally relevant illustrations are intentionally integrated into leadership education, students are able to engage with Western theories in ways that support identity formation, self-understanding, and meaningful learning.