UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AMONG MUSLIM WOMEN ACADEMIC LEADERS OF TWO SELECTED PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN MALAYSIA AND SAUDI ARABIA

SAMAH HATEM AL MAKI

FPP 2017 7

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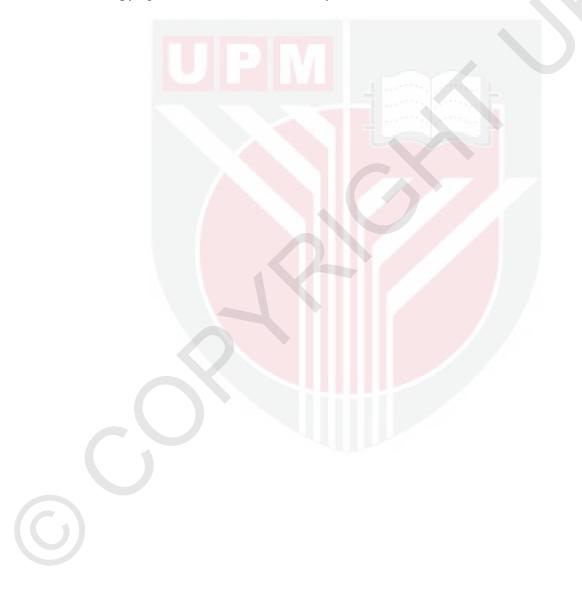
By

SAMAH HATEM AL MAKI

Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in the Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
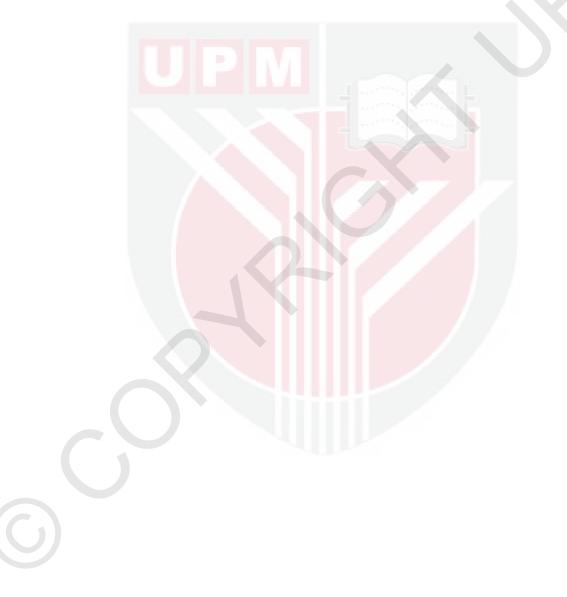
January 2017

DECLARATION

My dissertation is dedicated to each Muslim woman who seeks to prove her worth, holistic maturity, ability and contribute to the development of respective society. It is for every Muslim woman who is keen to work as a role model. Moreover, this work is dedicated to our beloved parents who have spent countless and sleepless nights to think about my wholeness and holiness growing as a conscious Muslim woman. Words are limited to thank all of you for your time and efforts for my success. It is my hope that this work will contribute to the growing awareness of the potentials of women leaders in general and Muslim women leaders in specific through the world.

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in Fulfillment of the partial requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AMONG MUSLIM WOMEN ACADEMIC LEADERS OF TWO SELECTED PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN MALAYSIA AND SAUDI ARABIA

By

SAMAH HATEM AL MAKI

January 2017

Chairman : Professor Abu Daud Silong, PhD
Faculty   : Educational Studies

Muslim women have achieved many significant milestones professionally in higher education. It is no longer unusual to see Muslim women climb the leadership ladder and contribute for positive development in higher education. This study was conducted to explore university leadership practices among Muslim women academic leaders two public University in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Specifically, this study focused on: Firstly, What does leadership mean to Muslim Women academic Leaders. Secondly, how do Muslim women academic leaders practice leadership in higher education. Thirdly, what are the challenges that Muslim women leaders face in higher education and how do Muslim women leaders cope with challenges in leadership?

The study employed qualitative phenomenological case study approach. In-depth interviews were conducted to seek understanding, experiences and perspectives among ten Muslim women academic leaders in higher education in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Trustworthiness of the study was established through triangulation, member checks, field notes, and peer validation.

The findings of this study were presented in the alternative format of thesis writing. It includes the publication of four journal articles in the thesis report. The articles answered three research questions by looking into the phenomena from different angels. These articles include: understanding of the meaning of leadership, Muslim women academic leaders practices, and challenges faced by Muslim women. The major finding of this study showed different meaning of leadership exist among Muslim women academic leaders. In this regard, Muslim women academic leaders revealed comprehensive perspectives in the frame of integrating spiritual and intellectual dimensions in defining leadership role in higher education. The

respondents were keen to vision, being role model, accountability, encouragement and empowerment.

In addition, the findings revealed Muslim women academic leaders' focus and comforts in following the Islamic teachings and the overall leadership related practices of the Prophet Muhammad *sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam*. The respondents focused practices on academic leadership networking skills, changing and development, leadership competencies, leadership style and traits and ethics as important towards the aspired end. Furthermore, it was revealed that Muslim women academic leaders as other women leaders elsewhere face daunting challenges including of society and cultural stereotypes, personal and organizational factors in realisation of their leadership roles in higher education.

From the above findings, this study concluded that seeking the pleasure of *Allah* is fundamental in the comprehensive conceptualisation process of leadership. Besides, it was concluded that leadership practices among Muslim women leaders should be reflected with firm holistic experiences, integrated competencies, knowledge and skills in order to succeed in this world and hereafter. Above all, this study concluded that there is an acute need to exercise inclusive policies and workable strategies to overcome the challenges in leadership practices across gender.

Based on the findings it's recommended that university authorities to acknowledge the achievement of Muslim women leaders and develop institutional strategies to inspire the essence of being role models for others to emulate, and planning, designing and implementing curriculum of targeted interventions aimed to enrich university courses that would focus on preparing future female and male leaders with necessary combined professional skills and Islamic ethical values.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

AMALAN KEPIMPINAN UNIVERSITI DALAM KALANGAN PEMIMPIN AKADEMIK WANITA MUSLIM

Oleh

SAMAH HATEM AL MAKI

Januari 2017

Pengerusi : **Abu Daud Silung, Ph.D.**
Fakulti : **Pengajian Pendidikan**

Wanita Muslim telah memperoleh kejayaan besar yang boleh dibanggakan sebagai profesional di dalam sektor pendidikan tinggi. Sudah menjadi kelaziman wanita Muslim dilihat mendaki karier kepimpinan di dalam menyumbang kepada pembangunan positif di dalam pendidikan tinggi. Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji amalan kepimpinan di kalangan wanita Islam yang menjadi pemimpin akademik di dua Universiti awam di Malaysia dan Arab Saudi. Secara khusus, kajian ini memberi tumpuan kepada: Pertama, Apakah maksud kepimpinan di kalangan pemimpin akademik Wanita Islam. Kedua, bagaimanakah KAWM mengamalkan kepimpinan di dalam pendidikan tinggi. Ketiga, apakah cabaran kepimpinan wanita Muslim ketika berhadapan dengan pendidikan tinggi dan bagaimanakah kepimpinan wanita Muslim mengatasi cabaran di dalam kepimpinan? Kajian ini menggunakan keadah kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi kajian kes. Temubual secara mendalam dilaksanakan bagi mencari kefahaman, pengalaman dan perspektif di dalam kalangan sepuluh KAWM di Malaysia dan di Saudi Arabia. Kebolehpercayaan kajian diperoleh melalui kaedah triangulasi dan pemeriksaan rakan.

Hasil kajian ini telah dibentangkan dalam format alternatif penulisan tesis. Ini termasuk penerbitan empat artikel jurnal dalam laporan tesis. Artikel-artikel menjawab tiga persoalan kajian dengan melihat ke dalam fenomena dari sudut yang berbeza. Artikel-artikel ini termasuk: pemahaman makna kepimpinan, amalan pemimpin akademik wanita Islam, dan cabaran yang dihadapi oleh pemimpin wanita Islam dalam pendidikan tinggi. Penemuan utama kajian ini menunjukkan wujud makna yang berbeza dalam kepimpinan di kalangan wanita Islam yang menjadi pemimpin akademik. Dalam hal ini KAWM menunjukkan dimensi yang komprehensif di dalam rangka intergrasi dimensi intelektual dan spiritual bagi mendifinisikan peranan kepimpinan di dalam pendidikan tinggi. Respondan gemar dengan visi menjadi contoh teladan, bertanggungjawab, diberi galakkan dan kuasa.

Sebagai tambahan dapatan juga menunjukkan KAWM memberi tumpuan dan selesa di dalam kepimpinan mengikut ajaran Islam dan kepimpinan menyeluruh yang dikaitkan dengan amalan Nabi Muhammmad SAW. Respondan juga memberi tumpuan kepada kemahiran rangkaian, kepimpinan akademik, perubahan dan pembangunan, kompetensi kepimpinan, gaya kepimpinan dan tingkahlaku, serta etika penting ke arah kesudahan yang diharapkan. Dapatan kajian seterusnya menunjukkan KAWM sama seperti kepimpinan wanita yang lain berhadapan dengan cabaran kebimbangan termasuklah sikap negatif masyarakat dan budaya stereotaip, personal serta faktor organisasi di dalam merealisasikan peranan kepimpinan mereka di dalam pendidikan tinggi.

Daripada dapatan diatas kajian ini merumuskan bahawa memperoleh kerezaan Allah SWT adalah merupakan dasar di dalam konsep komperehensif bagi proses kepimpinan. Selain daripada itu dirumuskan juga iaitu keberkesanan amalan kepimpinan dalam kalangan kepimpinan wanita boleh direflek melalui pengalaman holistik mereka yang kukuh, kompetensi yang diintegrasi serta kemahiran pengetahuan bagi memperoleh kejayaan di dunia dan di akhirat.Kajian ini juga merumuskan terdapat keperluan mendadak bagi mengamalkan dasar inklusif strategi yang boleh diklaksanakan bagi mengatasi cabaran di dalam amalan kepimpinan dengan jantina bersilang. Berdasarkan kajian ini ia adalah disyorkan bahawa pihak berkuasa universiti mengiktiraf pencapaian pemimpin wanita Islam dan membina strategi yang boleh memberi inspirasi untuk menjadi model contoh bagi orang lain mencontohi, dan merancang, mereka bentuk dan melaksanakan kurikulum campur tangan yang disasarkan bertujuan untuk memperkayakan kursus di universiti yang akan memberi tumpuan kepada menyediakan pemimpin wanita dan lelaki masa depan dengan menggabungkan kemahiran profesional dan nilai-nilai etika Islam.

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All praises belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. I am very grateful to the Almighty Allah, for guiding me to praise Him, which in itself requires more praise, *Alhamdulillah*. I thank the Almighty Allah the Omniscient and Omnipresent for His blessings and help to me throughout this wonderful journey of seeking knowledge.

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Furthermore, I also would like to thank the entire academic and non-academic staffs both male and female at the Universiti Putra Malaysia in general and at the faculty of Educational Studies, especially its Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education. I also would like to thank all my fellow PhD students and friends within the Universiti Putra Malaysia for sharing and academic support throughout. More specifically, I would like to express my thanks Dr. Mnyero Janja Ibn Sheikh Gunda for his assistance, time, support, motivation, education and mental support during my PhD work. Thank you very much for your support and love.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 17 January 2017 to conduct the final examination of Samah Hatem Almaki on her thesis entitled "University Leadership Practices among Muslim Women Academic Leaders of two Public University in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia" in accordance with the Universities and University College Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U. (A) 106] 15 March 1998. The committee recommends that the student awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

Members of the Thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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Date:

Declaration by graduate student

I hereby confirm that:
- this thesis is my original work
- quotations, illustrations and citations have been duly referenced
- the thesis has not been submitted previously or concurrently for any other degree at any institutions
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Declaration by Members of Supervisory Committee

This is to confirm that:
- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
- supervision responsibilities as stated in the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Graduate Studies) Rules 2003 (Revision 2012-2013) were adhered to.

Signature:
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Over the decades, there has been a growing interest on higher education as a rich training ground for leader. Central to the discussion is the question of including women counterparts into executive leadership posts. It is thought that, both men and women have the passion for achievement, and once established as leaders in organization both behave and act the same (Prewitt, Weil & McClure, 2011). Yet, in the academia, the situation seems to favour men as the standard against women leadership in terms of power and opportunity to potential roles (Kattan, 2012). The rooted stereotype about women leadership is pervasive that neither the field of academia nor society, appear at ease when women possess the same leadership inspired direction as men. According to Walker (2004) women have to go through and accept such blemished image in a way to overcome the stereotypes and prove wrong the sceptics. Hence, it can be reasoned that women need to take risk and demonstrate the sense of competitiveness as conditions of being executive leaders.

To date, research and writings about women leadership are continually being contested, refined and modified predominantly, through conventional thought (Steward, 2009; Prewit, et al. 2011). Inappropriately, most studies seem to have adopted generalized stance of arguments that give the impression to neglect, other non-Western thoughts and considerations (Merriam & Kim, 2008). That makes the research on the phenomenon of women leadership to be in demand of other perspectives, particularly when unique skills, ideas, attitudes, modes, and abilities to lead organizations of non-West women, are put into perspectives to the necessities of the new era (Helgesen, 1990). For example, women in Malaysia have proved their ability to lead and to succeed in public and private academic sectors (Aziz, 2011). There are also enriched experiences from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia where women have been gradually incorporated into various policy and decision -making activities of academic councils (Alsaleh, 2009). This means women as men can contribute to the position of leadership.

The said development has had vital effects for the formulation of this study. This chapter gives the background to the study on the roles that Muslim women academic leaders practice and the possible challenges that may hinder their ambitions to assume leadership positions in both Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. It covers the problem statement, research questions, significance, scope and limitations of the study. Finally, it provides operational definitions and the chapter summary.

1.2   Background of the Study

Leadership is associated with several factors. In the discussion of leadership as a concept, capabilities and behaviour of a leader, culture, society, education, skills,

experience, and knowledge have been thought of as key factors that enhance people's chances of achieving leadership positions. In this respect, women are generally more in need of such capabilities to be able to succeed in leadership. This is because most policies and societies restrict opportunities for women to reach leadership positions and make improvements (Kattan, 2012).

In the twenty-first century, research has confirmed that women have the skills needed for leadership (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003; Helgesen, 1990). The point is made that women bring to the leadership field an arsenal of constructive ideas and cognitive strengths, to benefit the entities they lead at the global, national, and local levels (Chandler, 2011). So far however, just relying only on women's leadership traits sounds inadequate for activating their roles. The surrounding environment can also be helpful in activating women potentials in leadership roles. The societies play a vital role in empowering women and provide them with what Abdel-Azim (2010) suggests as the necessary conditions and facilities for creativity for the assigned roles.

Traditionally, men have been occupying the most central positions in organizations. It is thought that leadership, in many work organizations has been a gender-biased search in favour of men (Grey-Bowen & McFarlane, 2010). This sort of understanding and conventional views seems to support the conceptual premise that, women generally suffer discriminatory practices in acquiring senior positions (Howie & Tauchert, 2001). The same conclusion is given by Powney (1997) that women have to work hard in order to access administrative positions in higher education and in the career stages in a university or college of higher education. This generalization suggests that women regularly come in second to men in getting executive leadership positions in academic institutions. In the next part, the description of women leadership in academic institutions is established.

1.2.1   Women Leadership in Academic Institutions

As the world grows into a global society, education is understood as an authoritative opportunity for human resource development. Many analysts and researchers now argue that academic posts for women have not been open and assured. For instance, Ward & Eddy (2013) maintain that academic leadership positions are not open for women who have families. Specifically, Dugger (2001) is concerned that representation of women at professorial ranks and administrative career ladder in higher education is unsatisfactory. One of the issues that can be reasoned from these observations is that only few women advance into senior executive academic leadership positions in higher education institutions. From practical experiences, perhaps, an exception can be given to women working as nurses and or principals in nursery school level.

Interestingly, recent developments in higher education have heightened the need for addressing women leaders' success. A considerable amount of literature has been published on this issue. These studies point out that women are needed to share in leadership and decision-making if institutions are to reflect the diversity of their programmes in the scope of shared ideas, multiple perspectives and more collective

leadership inputs (Lahti, 2013; Jarboe, 2013). These remarks provide further support for the hypothesis that higher education institutions can make a difference in their performance upon creating diverse opportunities to include competent women into leadership posts. This is what Jarboe (2013) comments as necessary focus for equality and diversity of competency to best suit the purpose individual higher education institution. Taken together, it can be reasoned that women once involved can demonstrate required skills and competencies in leadership position. As Hassan & Silong (2008) suggest that women when involved have potentials to contribute to community changes and development. In the following part, the description of Muslim women leadership in higher education is given before discussing specific Muslim women academic leaders in specific Muslim societies.

1.2.2   Muslim Women Leadership in Academic Institutions

More recent attention has focused on the provision of women leaders in Muslim countries. What makes the topic of Muslim women leadership in academic institutions interesting to be studied in the first place? Understandably, there is a constant discussion among Muslims about women in leadership positions, especially Muslim women academic leaders (Stowasser, 2001). For the sake of this study, however, the following reasons demand attention: First, Muslims in general and Muslim women academic leaders in particular are standing up for their rights including the right to lead, and offer notable contributions in leadership positions in academics (Al-Hafad & Al-Aradi, 2012). An implication of this observation is the prospect that by studying Muslim women academic leaders is to recognize and acknowledge them in the field. Second, the conventional nature of some of the Muslim societies such as Saudi Arabia society would encourage genuine interactions and sharing between a female researcher and Muslim women academic leaders.

Conversely, the same society would complicate interaction for a female researcher to interview or interact with male respondents (Jamjoom, 2010). This study may help us to understand ability of Muslim women academic leaders to lead and inform the ongoing discussion about the kinds of leadership women can offer in higher education. For that reason, choosing Muslim women academic leaders provides numerous possibilities of expanding the literature on women leadership. Thirdly, the leadership paradigm according to Beekun & Badawi (1999) is now changing in favour of promoting and demanding ethics including sincerity and integrity to be paramount in leaders' practices. In this respect, this topic becomes essential in order to appreciate their moral potentials in the field of leadership in higher education, and do away the surrounding mythologies that Muslim women academic leader unlike other women are, extremely private and cannot contribute to transformation (Peshkova, 2009; Doumato, 1995). This reason provides further support for the premise that for quite sometimes Muslim women academic leaders have not been studied in considerable detail. Given that Muslim women represent prospective reserve in human capital (Aziz, 2011); words are inadequate to justify the importance of studying Muslim women leadership in academic institutions. Taken together, with Islamic views Muslim women academic leaders were expected to speak for themselves. In the following subsection, specific focus is given to experiences of Muslim women academic leaders in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia.

1.2.2.1 Malaysia Muslim Women Academic Leaders

The issue of Muslim women academic leaders in Malaysia has continued to receive considerable critical attention. One reason could be due to the Malaysian government's acknowledgement to the potentials of women. According to Ling, Suleiman & Arif (2014) the Malaysian government formed the National Women's Policy by setting a goal that 30 per cent of the decision-makers in Malaysia have to be women. Samariang Sharifah Asidah Sayyid Ahmad Ghazali who is a member of a Legislative Assembly in Malaysia cited in (Ling et al., 2014) reported that the role of women is seen to be more significant to ensure that they are included in the serious attempts of developing their respective countries. This observation has important implications for unveiling the centrality of Muslim women academic leaders in Malaysian in higher education.

The observation on women in leadership role in education and academic to enhance Malaysian female participation by Ali (2012) draws interesting examples. Ali has noted such prominent Muslim women academic leaders as Tan Sri Datuk Dr. Rafiah Salim as the first female Vice-Chancellor at the University of Malaya. Other three appointed Vice-Chancellors included Professor Datuk Dr. Zaleha Kamaruddin at the International Islamic University Malaysia, Dato' Dr. Aminah Ayub at the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, and Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dr. Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Currently, we have Prof Datin Paduka Dr. Aini Ideris as the Vice Chancellor at the Universiti Putra Malaysia. This list of Malaysian Muslim women academic leaders provides some support for the conceptual premise that once integrated in leadership positions, women can perform wonders in demonstrating leadership accountability (Al-Hafad & Al-Aradi, 2012; Beekun & Badawi, 1999). This observation offers a vital set to unveil useful understandings from the Malaysian Muslim women leader in higher education. The next subsection, therefore, moves on to highlight the Saudi Muslim Women Academic Leaders.

1.2.2.2 Saudi Muslim Women Academic Leaders

The growing efforts by Saudi government to promote and integrate women potentials are at the heart of our understanding of Saudi Muslim women leaders in higher education. Back to September 2000, the Saudi government passed a convention intended to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. Commenting on this convention, Al-Munajjed (2009) reflects the process it went through from being introduced, signed and ratified amidst some reservations aired against it. To date, almost twenty four universities exist for women. In addition, more than 58 per cent of students in the Saudi universities are women (Al-Munajjed, 2009). Interestingly, the Saudi government in promoting access for women in higher education has established Princess Noura bint Abdul Rahman University (PNU) the largest women-only university in the world (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). The remarkable part is that the PNU is the only university in Saudi Arabia run entirely by Muslim women academic leaders.

Perhaps the most serious lesson from the above Saudi experiences is that the belief on Muslim women academic leadership potentials is a reality. To date, no wonder that

women in Saudi Arabia have prospects to hold executive leadership positions in higher education such as vice-dean, deans of faculties, and vice-presidents of universities and heads of departments (Al-Kayed, 2015). One of the outstanding examples is related to Nora bint Abdullah al-Fayez who was appointed as the first Saudi Female in Saudi Arabian Ministry of women affairs (Alexander-Snow, 2010). Another example includes the late Princess Jawhara Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz who was appointed as leader of the Princess Noura bint Abdul Rahman University (PNU). Elsewhere, Al-Ghamdi (2013) shares about Dr. Mounira Maaloul the first Deputy Governor in Technical and Vocational Training Corporation and Dr. Haya Awwad who was appointed as Deputy Chancellor as the second highest position of women in the Ministry of Education (Al-Ghamdi, 2013). In view of all that has been mentioned so far, one may suppose that the significant achievement by Muslim women at the leadership participation is still growing in both countries. Until recently, however, there has been no reliable evidences that combine lived life perspectives, practices and challenges amongst Muslim women leaders in higher education systems of these two countries. Drawing from the foregoing discussions, the following section highlights the problem statement of the study.

1.3   Problem Statement

Women leadership is an increasingly important topic of research in higher education. Different studies and reviews in Saudi Arabia (Al-Baz, 2011; Al-Ghamdi, 2013; Al-Ghanem, 2008) and Malaysia (Unin, 2014; Ali, 2012; and Aziz, 2011) as in other parts of the world, are now showing that women are progressively entering leadership positions that formerly were male dominated (Pieta & Dijksma, 2013). However, a major problem from many previous studies is to play around male-female conflicting perspectives, and do not move away from that rhetoric. This is one of the major flaws of Western conventional inspired thoughts (Merriam & Kim, 2008). Unfortunately, such conflict inspired thoughts have also been gradually introduced into the discourses of women as leaders of higher education in developing countries, including Muslim countries. This trend has often led to one-sidedness of view and underrated female leadership in pursuit of integrated female perspectives, and effectiveness in comparison to male (Abu-Tineh, 2012; Carroll, 2006). The research to date has tended to focus on successful factors as positive attitude, women's personality traits, and women' personal attitudes, attitudes of society for women leadership in the higher education sector (Shahtalebi, Yarmohammadian & Ajami, 2011). What is not yet clear, however, are the experiences of leadership amongst Muslim women academic leaders in Muslim dominated and Islamic countries.

Leadership in higher education is at the heart of our understanding of the quality teaching and learning environment (Al-Shuaiby, 2009). Remarkably, the nature of leadership in higher education is ambiguous and contested (Nejati, 2010) and leaders are needed to master different sets of leadership skills, with improved competencies both in theories and practices (Shahmandi, Silong, Ismail, Samah & Othman, 2011). So far, a sizable amount of literature on female academic leadership in Saudi Arabia (Al-Baz, 2011; Al-Ghamdi, 2013; Al-Ghanem, 2008; Al-Shihabi & Mohammed, 2001) and Malaysia (Hilal, 2015; Unin, 2014; Aziz, 2011; and Ismail & Ibrahim, 2008) confirm that women remain under-represented in top leadership positions in higher education. Some women do attain top leadership positions, but still there is a wide gap between

documented research and the number of women in leadership positions (Cook & Glass (2014). Although, the situation of Muslim women involvement in leadership roles in higher education is changing, but the number of women leaders in the top of leadership hierarchy is still Unsatisfactory (Dugger, 2001). Women are habitually trapped in the middle and lower leadership levels, and this occurrence is prominent worldwide. Even though much energy and thought have been devoted to overcome the institutional and attitudinal discrimination that prevents women leaders career development, yet, many of the results are below expectations.. According to Wood and Lindorff (2001), the numbers of women who are graduating now more than men from higher educational institutions, and more women are entering the paid workforce and assuming leadership roles, but lack representation of women on the top of leadership position continues. This was because of the traditional models and approaches of career in organisations and institutions which are keen on the men' experiences (Mavin, 2001). There are still many obstacles (e.g., glass ceilings) preventing women from obtaining the high leadership level in higher education in Saudi Arabia (Alshammari, 2016; Al-Doubi, 2007; Almenkash, Abdulaziz, Shaman, Haijan & Dagsh, 2007) and Malaysia (Sharif, 2015; Abidin,Rashid & Jusoff, 2009) . That makes rethinking of underrepresentation of senior women's leadership practices in academy being a major concern (Almaki, Silong, Idris and Abd Wahat, 2016). Yet, practices of Muslim women leaders in higher education both in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia have lingered largely outside conventional research.

It becomes progressively hard to overlook the limited opportunities and leadership roles for women in higher education (Madsen, Longman & Daniels, 2012). Different challenges have been raised. Some researchers are concerned with the challenging nature of leadership required for the excellent organizations (Stead & Elliot 2009). Other researchers report about the increasing role that women should play in higher education in order to fit the criteria of good leadership (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Some studies have reported on imbalanced opportunities that challenge women in leadership roles in higher education in Muslim societies, including Saudi Arabia (Shah & Saha, 2012; Walker, 2004) and Malaysia (Ali, 2012). However, the research to date has tended to focus on women leaders in a particular Muslim society rather than comparing in detail their perspectives from different Muslim societies. This happens in the middle of diverse nature of Muslim women as a community, with multiple ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds and different levels of religiosity (Almaki et al., 2016). The use of phenomenological case study could help to gain insights of different perspectives of Muslim women leaders in higher education from more than one Muslim society.

Building from the above problems, this study was conducted to fill the gap in knowledge in the field of leadership in higher education. This research sought to explore the university leadership practices of Muslim women academic leaders in leadership practices and the possible challenges against their access and passions to assume leadership positions in higher education institutions.

1.4   Main Research Question

The main research question was how do Muslim women academic leaders practice leadership?

Specific Research Questions

The responses to this main research question were specifically guided by the following three specific research questions:

1) What does leadership mean to Muslim women academic leaders?
2) How do Muslim women academic leaders practice leadership in higher education?
3) What are the challenges that Muslim women leaders face in higher education, and how do Muslim women leaders cope with challenges in leadership?

1.5   Significance of the Study

> *"Leadership is about change and movement — perceiving the need for a new direction, figuring out where the organization needs to go, formulating a strategy to get there and motivating employees to make it happen"(*Dembowski, 2006).

In line with the above research questions, this study is significant for new knowledge in the human resource development field, policy making and improving implementation of practices as shown below:

Contribution to New Knowledge in the Field of Human Resource Development

In this area, the study findings remained significant in the following ways: Being an empirical research, this study highlights some leadership concepts and issues related to Muslim women academic leaders' perceptions and practices. The findings should make an important contribution to the field by adding insights into the relationships on how Muslim women academic leaders perceive leadership and get engaged in leadership position. In this respect, the current study has extended and enriched some conceptual issues in the discourse of Muslim women leaders' views regarding leadership in higher education. This appears as an exciting opportunity to advance our knowledge that could help decision-makers in higher learning institutions both in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia as well as other Muslim societies to acquire and maintain reasonable advantage consistent to high Muslim women leadership performance.

Contribution to improve Implementation of Practices

Exploring the leadership practices of Muslim women in higher education may help to the development of women leaders in general and Muslim women leaders in particular. This is possible as noted by Yoder (2001, p. 825) that "there is no single formula for making females more effective as leaders, because there is no singular definition of leadership". This suggests that the less number of Muslim women leaders in higher education can influence the nature of training needed by women to increase their chances of becoming effective and successful academic leaders. By understanding the leadership practices of Muslim women leaders and their ability to lead in higher learning institutions, may help to overcome challenges linked to higher leadership

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positions. This finding is important as it contributes to development of distinctive qualities which can be employed to inspire other women leaders.

Moreover, the study further offers practical guidelines and suggestions to leaders in every organization on how to lead and act in difficult situations. This study provides an exciting opportunity to advance our knowledge of the possible clarifications on strengths and weaknesses linked to Muslim women leaders' practice. In other words, the findings offer necessary grounds for proper judgments on the strengths the women academic leaders bring in the leadership and weak points which could be corrected for better practices. By implication the findings agreed one of the maxims that do not judge the book by its cover. Furthermore, findings of this study can be used as a step forward in developing the Muslim women leadership in general and Muslim academic women leaders in particular.

Contribution to Policy Making

In agreement with abovementioned contributions, the findings of this study are significant in policy making discourse as follows: The findings of this study could help policy makers make research-based decisions and develop constructive gender-friendly strategies and policies necessary for institutions of higher education. The policy requiring women leaders to excel in professional qualifications would lead to positive changes and developments in the respective institutions. The findings have integrated the Islamic views of Hereafter, *amānah* (trust) and the essence of spiritual experience in the daily affairs of the practicing Muslim women academic leaders an act of *ibadah* (worship). Given such research evidence, policy makers could capitalize on those experiences for developing comprehensive policies in line with the grand life mission and purposes of Muslim women academic leaders in particular. Therefore, it can be concluded that the unified spiritual and intellectual dimensions add to our understanding about potential driving force that Muslim women academic leaders suggest as their nuts and bolts to good leadership.

1.6   Scope and Limitations of the Study

Consistent to the research objectives this section highlights limitations or mapping the boundary of this study as illustrated below:

The limitations of a research disclose the situations that may provide and confine boundaries for the study. The researcher purposively sampled experienced respondents from Muslim women leaders within two institutions of higher education. In Malaysia, the participants were selected from the University Putra Malaysia (UPM). In Saudi Arabia, the participants came from the King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU). That was important in order to strengthen the essence of studying the problem from the perspectives of Muslim women academic leaders. Given a relatively small size of respondents, the findings would be unique to themselves. This means the findings might not be employed beyond the given settings unless other women academic leaders have similar characteristics to those of the respondents in this study.

Another limitation is that the transcribed notes and final emerged themes and conclusions from the findings were not communicated to respective respondents for further reflections, comments, critics and suggestions. This is a limitation because qualitative research inquiry requires member checks to establish credible findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If themes were shared, the respondents could come up with constructive suggestions to the best of their knowledge and experiences. However, that communication did not take place as most of the respondents had constricted administrative schedule.

Being a qualitative research, respondents were engaged to share their lived life experiences, beliefs, practices, knowledge and skills on leadership related matters. The limitation comes as some of the shared ideas and terms do not have a standard definition for the terms that are used. Some of the terms views seemed to be narrowly explained leaving gaps of understanding, of which the researcher had to consult more literatures for reasonable authentication. Sometimes an individual could have a cognitive belief about a situation, but the practice could be different due to the description associated with the role of the position. Based on the aforesaid scope and limitation, therefore, the findings of this study need to be treated with caution.

1.7   Definitions of Key Terms

In the scope of this study, the following definitions of key terms were in order:

Leadership

This refers to ability to influence subordinates, assistants through contact and guidance to create and develop team spirit, towards achievement of planned targets.

Leadership Practice

The term leadership practice is used in this study to entail various ways that a leader needs to be able to lead. Leadership practice is a formidable collection of patterned actions that draw on a set of competencies, skills, knowledge and attitudes that Muslim women leaders must possess to be effective in assigned leadership duties in academic setting.

Academic Leadership

Academic leadership describes as a collection of academic and administrative functions and tasks performed by individuals appointed to formal positions at universities (i.e. Vice Chancellor, Dean, Vice Dean and Head of Department). Most notably, in this study, academic leadership refer to the individuals who occupy a position of leadership based on activities undertaken by department, namely programs activities, administrative work, faculty-related activities and personal academic activities.

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Muslim Women Academic Leaders

For the sake of this research, Muslim women academic leaders were conceptualized as those women holding an administrative leadership positions in higher education such as Dean, Deputy Deans and Heads of the departments with more than one year of leadership experience at the given universities.

Women Leadership Challenges

In the scope of this study, the women leadership challenges included things and situations that suggested difficulties and seemed to prevent Muslim women academic leaders working in the institutions of higher education to fulfill their duties in adequate manner. This happened at the leadership role, whether on a personal level, organizational level, or at the community level.

1.8   Summary of the Chapter

This chapter attempted to describe the background to the research. It started with the introduction, the background of the study, problem statement, objectives and questions, significance, scope and limitations and definitions of key terms. In the background was further detailed to describe women leadership in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia and the challenges they faced in accessing and during leadership positions in higher education. Specifically, this chapter proposes research questions to the study. It was expected that the responses could possibly make humble contribution to new knowledge in the human resource development field, policy making and improving implementation of Muslim women leadership practices. Taken together, this chapter explores the background and proposes the objectives and questions to guide the study.

9.3.2. Recommendations for Practices

This study was conducted to explore university leadership practices among Muslim women academic leaders. The findings of this study have the following associated recommendations for improved future practice.

Changing the socio-cultural stereotypes on women leaders involves transformation in peoples' mind-sets and leadership practices, processes, and organizational culture. A reasonable approach to tackle this issue could be planning, designing, and implementing curricula of targeted interventions aimed at enriching university courses that would focus on preparing future female and male leaders with necessary combined professional skills and Islamic ethical values. Furthermore, the findings should encourage university authorities to acknowledge the achievements of Muslim women leaders and develop institutional strategies to inspire the essence of being role models for others to emulate. Periodically, higher education institutions could offer workshops and/or programs for both men and women to share understanding and experiences regarding gender roles and overall leadership competencies. The focus should be that of creating personal and workplace awareness and increasing opportunities for mutual understanding and respect for one another.

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