Education Project V

Project Summary

The broad goal of this project is to develop a practical understanding of how language operates and how narratives are created across various academic disciplines in tertiary education and its effects on the professional contexts in the MENA region. Exploring the barriers faced by university graduates, especially females and those of minority populations is necessary to better understand the underlying socio-cultural issues blocking their access to employment and ability to move up the socioeconomic ladder. Improved understanding of these larger issues allows for increased ability to bring about paradigm shifts for lasting cultural change.

Introduction

Participating students in the GSE Tomorrow's Leaders initiative will engage in research to determine ways of improving quality of, in, and through education, as well as determine the nature of discourse intersections of professional communities throughout the MENA region. Economic growth and civic involvement depend, in large part, on the capacity of citizens and employees to understand 1) the discourses of the disciplines (e.g., Disciplinary literacy; Wolsey et al., 2012), and 2) strategies of improving quality (including equity and relevance) in education delivery. Each discipline uses language in different ways. Focusing on the language allows all students, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity to move out of the periphery and become experienced members of the communities of practice in their fields (Lave & Wenger, 2001). While knowledge of specific discourses in various disciplines is growing, the intersections of those discourses remain unexplored. As both language and identity are social constructs, there is a need to continue to better understand the impact of the convergence of gender constructs with the language used in and across disciplines (Skaggs, 2012). At the completion of this initiative, there will be a better understanding of the nature of disciplinary intersections among professional communities, the synergistic effects of language and gender within the disciplines, and analysis and authentication of high impact practices that improve student movement toward success. Participants will deliver scholarly and practical deliverables that address disciplinary literacy, greater access regardless of gender, and improved education quality.

Problem Statement

Throughout Egypt and MENA, youth increasingly find themselves in a state of NEET; that is "not in education, employment, or training." Many young Egyptians with university education find there are insufficient employment opportunities, and this problem is exacerbated for the nation's women and poorest individuals in rural areas of the country. Gender disparity in employment presents significant challenges female university graduates face. Because the Ministries of Education and Technology and Higher Education are currently investing heavily in initiatives to improve quality, relevance, and equity in education, and the government is supporting these innovative initiatives, the present proposal is situated to make an additional impact on the problem of youths' and women's unemployment.

Background

The Graduate School of Education at AUC is well suited to address these topics. Her experiences and expertise allow Dr. Skaggs to bring a vast wealth of interdisciplinary knowledge to this project. The faculty of the academic unit is diverse with backgrounds in literacy, gender studies, and international education and they come from the United States, Lebanon, Egypt, and Ethiopia with experience in many regions of the world including Africa, China, Central America, and the

Middle East. Our research has led us to findings that indicate while the breadth and depth of knowledge of specific disciplines are extensive (see Wolsey, 2010), there is little understood regarding the juxtaposition of the narratives and rhetoric with practice and outcomes through the intersection of these disciplines (Skaggs, 2012).

Significance
There are few studies in the region addressing the role of gender inequalities represented in the language used professionally, in civic discourse, or in the public sphere (see Habermas, 1989). Gaining an understanding of how these juxtapositions affect the accessibility of different disciplines for all regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, etc. allows for more effective and equal educational experiences across the academic spectrum. Understanding and utilizing applicable knowledge from various disciplines to have them inform each other is a necessary component for holistic and increased educational capacity. As tertiary education continues to work in "academic silos" (Purinton & Skaggs, 2017), it is necessary to provide empirical studies that examine holistic, yet practical strategies and methods of ensuring cross-disciplinary educational equity, access, and relevance, particularly with a global understanding.

Project description
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The Advancement of Scientific Knowledge and Broader Impact
In addition to the development of the instruments described above and the research conducted through the thesis process, applicants and their mentors will participate in international conference presentations, prepare a themed issue for a selected journal, and write for other top-tier publications. The Graduate School of Education will sponsor a conference on the topic at AUC's historic Tahrir Square campus with invited participants and plenary speakers from throughout the Egyptian and MENA business communities. Finally, applicants will produce and maintain a blog and open access library that makes their work available to those around the region.

Biographical Sketch
Jennifer Skaggs has been working in higher education for over 30 years focusing on the holistic development of student identity and negotiation within transnational settings and how different educational practices "translate" across cultural and linguistic borders for improved pedagogies; how interpretative communities (formal & vernacular) are formed within educational spaces around specific shared texts and the social constructions of the "reader" and "leader" across various boundaries. Her research on career/professional transitions, international P-20 STEM and experiential education has allowed her to publish and present to a broad range of corporate, non-

profit, and education sectors. She has co-authored two books and she serves as an international consultant on higher education, transnational educational and corporate cultural issues.

Leveraging Resources

The Graduate School of Education is the home to the Middle East Institute of Higher Education. MEIHE's influence and connections to rural schools and to the Supreme Council for Higher Education. The GSE Centennial Lab project provides additional capacity to the unit through its digital content development component that reaches out to school teacher leaders throughout the country. Partners in the professional educator diploma program, ERASMUS+ offer additional resources for conducting this research.

Deliverables

Deliverables include a master thesis deposited at the Digital Archive and Research (DAR) Repository of the American University in Cairo, publically accessible. In addition, the results of the research project will be disseminated through recognized venues in the field, such as international conferences and/or journals. Furthermore, they include an open access repository for Gender Discourse and Professional Literacies in MENA with accompanying blog, as well as the development of assessment instruments to be used in instruction in basic and higher education and in business applications. These would be subject to copyright and/or patent.

Professional Development and Mentoring Plan

The selected student will be provided with a single point of contact through the Graduate School of Education to help them adjust to life at The American University in Cairo and guide them to appropriate financial, residential, and academic resources. In addition, the Co-PI will act as the thesis supervisor of the student providing guidance for the development of the research plan, and through close supervision of the thesis work conducted would support the student in completing the work and disseminating the findings. Furthermore, the student will participate in 360-degree evaluations that help build an understanding of their strengths and build their ability to use such tools in the market place or public sector.

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