

## Cultural Perspectives of Associating Music With the Giftedness in Saudi Arabia

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### Abstract

In the literature, performing music is regarded as a manifestation of giftedness. However, the legitimacy of this activity has been the topic of much debate among Islamic scholars since performing music first began. This paper aims to explore whether Saudis' conceptions of music are shaped by interpretation of religious law and dogma or by Western understandings of giftedness. A total of 14 teachers and Mosque Imams participated in this study. The findings showed that, although most in the teachers group personally admitted that music is part of the giftedness domain, for religious reasons, everyone in the teachers and Mosque Imams' group did not appreciate performing music. However, the participants showed significant appreciation for songs (i.e., recitation/ lyrics) without musical instruments.

**Key words:** Giftedness; Religion (Islam); Traits; Gifted children; Saudis; Teacher; Music

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### INTRODUCTION

It is widely agreed among Western researchers that exceptionality in performing music is regarded as a component of giftedness (e.g., Berglund, 2008; Chan, 2007; Clark, 1997; Hanna, 2007; Kitano & Kirby, 1986; Porter, 2005; Renzulli, 1978; Silverman & Baska, 1993;

Van Tassel-Baska & Benbow, 1998). However, whether this agreement is ascribed to within some Muslim societies such as Saudi Arabia is not addressed in the field. It may not be widely known that performing music is prohibited in Islamic culture. The current study aims to explore how Saudi teachers and Mosque Imams (The male prayer leader in a mosque) regard exceptionality in performing music and whether they associate it with Saudi gifted children. Due the fact that religion and culture are inseparable, this goal cannot be achieved unless we understand in depth the perceptions of music in Islam. Therefore, an intensive review of old and contemporary Muslim religious scholars is included in this study. To achieve the goal of the current study, the author attempted to explore the following questions: a) How do teachers perceive performing music and singing? b) How do Mosque Imams perceive performing music and singing? c) What are the differences in the participants' personal views and their Islamic beliefs?

### 1. THE CONCEPT OF MUSIC IN THE LITERATURE

In the West, not only is musical performance regarded as a manifestation of giftedness, it is also regarded as an educational requirement (Dai & Schader, 2002). This interest has resulted in the establishment of a significant amount of research focusing on music. For example, a total of 346 research projects focusing on music were undertaken in Australia between 1977 and 2002 (Stevens & McPherson, 2004). In the United States, the interest in music as an area of educational research dates to the first part of the twentieth century. Additionally, approximately 15 musical education studies were found, as were two musical therapies focusing on music education in the United States (Price, 2004). In the United Kingdom, children are encouraged to listen to and perform music as part of national curricular requirements (Welch et

al., 2004). The importance of this art form led many researchers to pay attention to music and whether music is an aspect of giftedness. An intensive review of the literature showed that it is rare to find a list of gifted children's characteristics that does not include exceptionalism in music as an indication of giftedness (e.g., Clark, 1997; Porter, 2005; Renzuli, 1978; Silverman & Baska, 1993; Van Tassel-Baska & Benbow, 1998). In the federal definition of giftedness in the United States, Marland (1972) has included visual and performing arts domains as manifestations that should be considered when defining giftedness (cited in Brown et al., 2005). Renzulli (1978) argued against the view that limited giftedness to high IQ. He proposed other areas such as exceptionalism in performing music and considered it a component of giftedness. Gardner (1983) established his multiple intelligences theory (IM) and classified musical intelligence as one of nine intelligences. It is widely agreed among scholars that musically gifted children profoundly enjoy musical sounds, show a high level of sensitivity to musical structures, have an outstanding ability to recall music and play it back, have perfect pitch, and enjoy dancing (Kitano & Kirby, 1986; Porter, 2005). The debates in Western literature concerning music focus mainly on the benefits of music and its impact on children's academic abilities (Evans, Bickel, & Pendarvis, 2000) and do not consider this art form as useless for cultural or religious reasons. How performing music, (e.g., singing with or without musical instruments), is perceived in Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia is the main concern of the following section.

## 2. MUSIC IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

Although the Islamic religion is widely known, awareness that the religion has diverse doctrines within it is not nearly as widespread. This diversity, however, results in varying interpretations of Islamic religious tenets among Islamic scholars. Although all Islamic scholars agree on the basic rules of Islam, some disagree on secondary issues. For example, music has been the topic of much debate among Islamic scholars since 700 AD. As mentioned previously, the main aim of this paper is to explore whether Saudis associate exceptionalism of performing music and extraordinary voice with the characteristics of giftedness. However, it may not be possible to attain this goal without understanding the role of religion (Islam) in this matter. Accordingly, the interpretations of playing and listening to music in Islam can be divided into three categories: permission, prohibition, and only songs without musical instruments accepted.

### 2.1 Permission

Religious scholars who permit musical performance ground their argument on the fact that there is no clear statement either in the Holy Quran or *Hadith* (a record

of the sayings of the prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him) regarding whether musical performance or singing is a sin (AlQaradawi, 1999). AlKalbani (2010), a former Imam of the Grand Mosque of Makkah, claims that Islam does not forbid singing with or without instrumental music. He argues, "What I believe is that there is no evidence in Islamic law that says performing music or singing is not permissible" ( para.3). AlQaradawi (1999) argued and noted a number of examples showing that music is permitted. He states that Ibn Umar and Alzubar, associates of the prophet Mohammed, listened to music and did not regard it as prohibited in Islam. In addition, AlQaradawi noted that Ibn Hazm, a famous Islamic scholar, said that if anyone listens to music to support his/her communication with Allah, he/she has not fallen into sin. This interpretation has been significantly accepted in some Muslim countries. In Jordan, Adely (2007) conducted a study to investigate the performance of music in secondary educational settings. He posed a number of questions, one of them being whether the participants considered their participation in a musical festival as *haram* (prohibited). A measure of agreement was observed among the sample when discussing singing with musical instruments. Although few participants regarded musical performance as *haram* most of the participants argued by saying that "We sing songs about the nation. There is nothing wrong with that" (p.1670). Another girl said that "the music is national music. It's not something loose [immoral]" (p.1673). Berglund (2008) attempted to investigate the perception of teachers toward teaching music at classroom in one Muslim School in Sweden. Although the author discussed this issue with only one teacher, the findings showed ambivalent views between teacher personal view and Islamic perspective regarding music. The teacher admitted that music is an important and useful activity but it is not considered as part of Islamic religious education.

### 2.2 Prohibition

Scholars who prohibited playing music and/or singing support their judgment with the following verse: "However, there are, among men, those who purchase idle talks, without knowledge (or meaning), to mislead (men) from the Path of Allah and throw ridicule (on the Path): for such there will be a Humiliating Penalty" (Al-Quran, Luqman, 6). Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328 AD) interpreted "the idle talks" to refer to, among other things, music and singing. Sheikh Abdulaziz Ibn Baz (1987) the late Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, affirmed this interpretation. Ibn Jebreen (n.d.), another famous religious scholar in Saudi Arabia, considered performing and listening to music a sin. When discussing the permissibility of music in the media of Saudi Arabia, the vast majority of Saudis strongly support the interpretation that prohibits playing music and listening to songs. However, most Saudis support the interpretation that allows only women to play the *def* and sing songs (personal observation).

### 2.3 Singing Without Musical Instruments

Singing without musical instruments has also seen a measure of disagreement among religious scholars in Islam. However, the argument among scholars seems to be less complicated than in the case of playing music. Most Islamic scholars have permitted singing without musical instruments. AlQaradawi (2001) stated that Al-Gazzali (1058-1111 AD) and Ibn Hazm (994-1063 AD), famous religious scholars in Islam, have demonstrated that singing without musical instruments was permitted by a vast majority of associates of the Prophet Mohammed. However, Ibn Baz and Ibn Jebreen believed that listening to songs with or without instrumental music leads Muslims astray from the right path of Allah and is destructive to their religious duties. They permitted only women to sing and play a *def* [a tambourine but without the cymbals]. In Adely's (2007) study, the participating males and females who prohibited songs accompanied with instrumental music justified their participation by saying that they just play a *def* and sing. The fact that the participants who stated this view were all females suggests that the study's participants may support the interpretation that permits only women singers who play the *def*. This interpretation has been welcomed among Saudis. However, due to the paucity of scientific research in Saudi Arabia regarding this matter, it should be noted that this assumption that Saudis accept only women singing and playing the *def* is based on the author's observation.

## 3. METHOD AND PROCEDURES

### 3.1 Participants

Sampling techniques were used to recruit the participants in this study, purposive sampling for the teachers group and convenience sampling for the Mosque Imams group. A total of fourteen participants participated in this qualitative study, eight male teachers and six Mosque Imams. The teachers sample was exclusively male. They all worked at the schools that have gifted children enrichment programs in Riyadh city. Their ages were between 25 and 40 years. All participating teachers had a bachelor's degree: mathematics (3), science (3), and computer science (2). Their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 22 years. All enrichment programs they were asked to provide were focused on elementary schools.

Regarding the Mosque Imams group, all participants had a bachelor's degree: *Sharia* (3), Islamic studies (2) and *hadith* (the sayings of the prophet Mohammed) (1). They all served as Imam of Mosques in Riyadh city. Their ages ranged from 30 to 55 years. No participants in the group had any teaching experience.

### 3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

An approval letter to conduct the study was obtained from the author department. To locate the teachers sample, the

approval letter was submitted to the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia with the request to facilitate the researcher mission. The Department for Studies and Research at the Ministry of Education reviewed the objectives and the scope of the study and rejected it. They argued against studying music which is prohibited in Islam. They assumed that studying such subject would open a window of endless debate in the society. After explaining that this study does not aim to establish a theory for permitting or prohibiting music in Muslim societies (Saudi Arabia) and shedding light on the need of such research in order to express Saudi opinions toward musical talent which is considered as a remarkable aspect of giftedness in the literature, the staff of the Department for Studies and Research agreed to give only verbal approval to the author to conduct the current study. They provided a list of schools where the teacher work and suggested the author to contact them and interview any teacher who is willing to take part in this study.

Regarding Mosque Imams group, based on the technique of the convenience sampling, the author targeted a number of Mosques in Riyadh city. Each Mosque Imam who is willing to participate in this study was provided with an invitation letter referring to the purpose of the study, plus the consent letters for participation.

A semi-structured interview consisting of open-ended questions was used to gather information from the participants. The average interview time was 30 minutes. All participants refused mentioning their name or using audio recording during interviews. Instead, they allowed the author to take notes and write down their responses. The teacher interviews were conducted in different places throughout the schools, such as the library and the teachers' classroom. The personal interviews of Mosque Imams were conducted in the Mosque after the *Asr* prayer (the third of five daily prayers). Since the identities of the participants in this study were anonymous, the author used the alphabetical letter plus the name of the place/date where and when the participants were interviewed to identify the participants. For example, with regard to the teachers who were interviewed at their classrooms during 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, January, 2014 (hereafter referred to as TEACHER-A\_CLASS-5JAN, 2014, TEACHER-B\_CLASS-5JAN, 2014, TEACHER-C\_CLASS-8JAN, 2014, TEACHER-D\_CLASS-8JAN, 2014 and TEACHER-E\_CLASS-12JAN, 2014). With regard to the teachers who were interviewed at the library during 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, January, 2014 (hereafter referred to as TEACHER-F\_LIB-12JAN, 2014, TEACHER-G\_LIB-14JAN, 2014 and TEACHER-H\_LIB-14JAN, 2014).

With regard to the Mosque Imams who were interviewed at the Mosque, where they serve, during 20<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014 (hereafter referred to as IMAM-A\_MOSQUE-20JAN, 2014, IMAM-B\_MOSQUE-23JAN, 2014, IMAM-C\_MOSAUE-25JAN, 2014, IMAM-D\_MOSQUE-27JAN, 2014, IMAM-E\_

MOSQUE-29JAN, 2014, IMAM-F\_MOSQUE-31JAN, 2014).

The interview questions discussed a number of topics including their personal perspective on music as a valuable aspect in the area of giftedness; personal perception of musically gifted people; the acceptance of music and singing in Islam; whether the perception of Islam toward music/singing disallows Saudis to associate elements of exceptionality in performing music with the Saudi gifted; which is the more appreciated among Saudis, performing music or singing without musical instruments, and why.

Because the aim of the current study is to explore the perceptions of teachers and Mosque Imams regarding music and singing and whether they associate them with gifted children, the data were analyzed through content analysis. Three categories were identified: a) personal perception of performing music and singing, b) permission of performing music and singing and c) prohibition of performing music and singing. Each interview was summarized, and each word/statement referring to the perceptions of the participants toward music and singing was grouped into a related category.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Teachers' Perceptions

The data showed that two components play an important role in shaping teachers' perceptions toward music and whether they considered it to be an aspect of giftedness. They are participants' personal views and religious views (Islam) (See Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Teachers' Perception of Associating Music With the Gifted in Saudi Arabia**

| Category                | Comments  |
|-------------------------|---|
| Personal views          | A wonderful activity  |
|                         | Associating music with giftedness   |
|                         | A person who displays talent for playing music is gifted                        |
|                         | Admitting that some Saudi singers are gifted                                    |
| Islamic religious views | Appreciating singing without accompanying musical instruments                   |
|                         | Music is useless activity   |
|                         | Music is forbidden in Islam   |
|                         | People who are listening to music are sinning                                   |
|                         | Songs that are performed without musical instruments are accepted among Muslims |

With respect to their personal views, most of the participants admitted that music is a wonderful activity and that a person who displays extraordinary talent in playing music is gifted. Regarding the Islamic perspective, they all agreed that music is not accepted in Islam, so musical talent seemed to be unappreciated for this reason. However, from a personal and/or religious perspective, the teachers felt comfortable perceiving

exceptionality in recitation (*nasheed*, reciting the Holy Quran, lyrics...etc.) as part of giftedness.

Some teachers personally shared comments that expressed appreciation for music and outstanding musicality. One teacher said that "from my point of view, I believe that some Saudi singers such as Mohammed Abdu or Abadi Aljohar have an extraordinary ability in playing instrumental music and singing" (TEACHER-B\_CLASS-5JAN, 2014). Another teacher shared this opinion:

We understand that some singers and musicians have remained in the field for years while others have disappeared quickly. This is because, in my view, the singers who have stayed for a long time have exceptional ability and skills that help them to attract and convince others. (TEACHER-D\_CLASS-8JAN, 2014)

However, from a religious perspective, the majority of teachers argued against the acceptability of music. They cited a number of verses from the Holy Quran and *hadith* to support their rejection of music. They argued that if Allah and the prophet Mohammed prohibit playing and listening to music, why do we attempt to legislate it? One teacher stated that "listening to music leads Muslims astray of the right path to Allah" (TEACHER-C\_CLASS-8JAN, 2014). Another noted that "music is perceived in Islam as a useless activity" (TEACHER-A\_CLASS-5JAN, 2014). Each participant was asked to give his opinion regarding the popularity of some TV programs in Saudi Arabia such as *Arabs Got Talent* and *Arab Idol*. The main goal of these programs is to support the identification of brilliant musicians and singers. Their responses were similar. One teacher argued against these programs and stated that "these programs are sponsored and supported by private institutions and do not represent the mainstream of Muslims' views" (TEACHER-C\_CLASS-8JAN, 2014). Another teacher stated that, "People who vote for musicians and singers or attend these musical events know that they are sinning" (TEACHER-H\_LIB-14JAN, 2014). The participants were asked whether they watch these programs. Some participants admitted yes. One teacher stated that "I sometimes watch *Arabs Got Talent*, and to be honest with you, I feel inside I am doing the wrong thing" (TEACHER-G\_LIB-14JAN, 2014). Another teacher admitted that "years ago, I attended one musical event. This is the only event I attended. If you ask me whether I am happy for having attended, I would say no" (TEACHER-F\_LIB-12JAN, 2014). On the other hand, the agreement between the perceptions' views and interpretation of religious law was particularly apparent when discussing singing without musical instruments. Many Islamic religious scholars permit singing without accompanying musical instruments; this includes the recitation, which may be known as the liturgy. The perceptions of teachers seemed to be consistent with the above view. One of the teachers stated that "songs that

do not include sexual innuendo and performing without musical instruments are accepted among Muslims” (TEACHER-A\_CLASS-5JAN, 2014). Another teacher distinguished between two types of songs. He stated the following:

Songs can be performed by just using solitary human voice or with accompanying musical instruments. In Islam, a Muslim is not allowed to listen to any type of music using an instrument. Thus, if anyone is interested, he can listen to the type of song that is performed by sounds effects or just by human voices. (TEACHER-E\_CLASS-12JAN, 2014)

## 4.2 Mosque Imams’ Perceptions

The Mosque Imams described their perceptions regarding the acceptance of music as a component of giftedness in two dimensions. First, unlike teachers, they personally considered playing and listening to music to be unlawful. Second they took into account the permissibility of music from the religious perspective. However, similar to teachers, the Mosque Imams regarded singing (i.e., recitation) without musical instruments to be acceptable in Islam (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Mosque Imams’ Perception of Associating Music With the Gifted in Saudi Arabia**

| Category                | Comments   |
|-------------------------|--|
| Personal views          | Music is useless activity  |
|                         | Do not associate exceptionality in playing music with the gifted                         |
|                         | A person who displays talent in playing music is not gifted                              |
| Islamic religious views | Musicians are not appreciated in society   |
|                         | Playing music is forbidden in Islam  |
|                         | Listening to music is forbidden in Islam   |
|                         | feel satisfied to adapt any religious interpretation that perceive music is <i>haram</i> |
|                         | Songs that are performed without musical instruments are accepted among Muslims          |

With respect to the personal views of the Mosque Imams’ participants toward music and whether they regard it as part of giftedness, all participants showed concurrence between their personal point of view and the Islamic perspective. One Mosque Imam considered “playing music, for religious reasons, a useless activity” (IMAM-B\_MOSQUE-23JAN, 2014). Another Mosque Imam noted that “even if anyone shows exceptionality in playing music, I will not consider him to be talented because he practices an activity that has been forbidden in Islam” (IMAM-F\_MOSQUE-31JAN, 2014). The participants were asked how they explained the popularity of musical events in Saudi Arabia and some other Islamic countries. They explained them by mentioning a number of reasons: “these parties are sponsored by some private organizations that may not care about Islamic law” (IMAM-E\_MOSQUE-29JAN, 2014); “the singers and musicians who participate in these activities are not appreciated in society” (IMAB\_MOSQUE-23JAN, 2014); and “most attendees are young people who may not

understand religious instruction in this matter” (IMAM-F\_MOSQUE-31JAN, 2014).

With respect to the Islamic perspective on the acceptance of playing and listening to music, all Mosque Imams’ participants argued that, from an Islamic point of view, performing or listening to music is prohibited. They brought into discussion a number of religious interpretations that demonstrate the illegitimacy of music. For example, the participants quoted Ibn Baz’s and Ibn Jebreen’s interpretations regarding this matter. These interpretations hold that playing or listening to music is prohibited in Islam. Accordingly, one Mosque Imam argued, “If the trustful religious scholars consider music to be unlawful, perceiving a person who plays instrumental music as gifted is meaningless” (IMAM-A\_MOSQUE-20JAN, 2014). To elaborate upon this point, the participants were asked to provide their views regarding another religious scholar’s interpretation that has been established by AlQaradawi. AlQaradawi discussed this issue extensively and found no statement in the Quran that refers explicitly to the prohibition of listening to music in Islam. All participants expressed their respect for AlQaradawi as a religious scholar. However, most of them stated that he often has unusual religious interpretations that may not be accepted by a wide range of Muslims in Saudi Arabia. Whether the rejection of AlQaradawi’s interpretation was because he is not a Saudi religious scholar was not mentioned by Mosque Imams’ participants. However, to clarify this point, the author asked the participants about the recent religious interpretation that has been released by AlKalbani, a famous Saudi religious scholar. AlKalbani, a previous Imam of the Holy Mosque in Makkah, permits singing with or without instrumental music. All the participants in the Mosque Imams group argued against this interpretation. One Mosque Imam agreed that “AlKalbani’s interpretation has faced tough criticism in Saudi Arabia by a wide range of well-known religious scholars and Muslims” (IMAM-D\_MOSQUE-27JAN, 2014). However, the agreement between Mosque Imams group and teachers group was obvious when discussing singing without musical instruments. According to one Mosque Imams, “songs that are not accompanied by with instrumental music and do not include sexual content are acceptable” (IMAM-C\_MOSAUE-25JAN, 2014). The participants identified these songs as *nasheed*. They appreciated singers who have an outstanding voice. They all agreed that singers who sing meaningful songs that strengthen morality and glorify religion are appreciated in Saudi Arabia.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This exploratory study was conducted to explore the perceptions of teachers and Mosque Imams toward

music and whether exceptionality in performing music can be associated with gifted children in Saudi Arabia. It is important to clarify that this study does not aim to convince Saudi society of the utility of music or to argue against the religious views that consider music to be a sin. Rather, this study mainly attempts to explore Saudi views toward music as a component of giftedness, which is mentioned by several researchers in the field (e.g., Berglund, 2008; Chan, 2007; Clark, 1997; Hanna, 2007; Kitano & Kirby, 1986; Porter, 2005; Renzulli, 1978; Silverman & Baska, 1993; Van Tassel-Baska & Benbow, 1998).

To review, results were found to fall into one of three categories: permission, prohibition and singing without instrumental music. These categories represent the perceptions of most participants' views toward music in general and to its association with the gifted in particular. The participants expressed their perspectives regarding music or singing in two views, personal views and religious views. The personal views of teachers regarding music seemed to be consistent with others found in the literature (e.g., Berglund, 2008; Chan, 2007; Clark, 1997; Porter, 2005; Renzulli, 1978; Silverman & Baska, 1993; Van Tassel-Baska & Benbow, 1998). However, teachers were very careful when expressing their personal views about music. Specifically, they frequently coupled statements expressing their personal appreciation of music with subsequent statements referring to religious doctrine on performing or listening to music. According to the findings, it seems that most participants feel satisfied with the religious interpretation that prohibits performing or listening to music. This attitude may convey the fact that, even though teachers observe an indication of exceptionality in performing music with any one of their students, they perhaps are not able to encourage and support those students. This notion may be understandable if we observe that no part of the Saudi curriculum from elementary school to university include music or encourages students to study it. Furthermore, none of the gifted children's enrichment programs operated by the Ministry of Education and King Abdulaziz Foundation for Giftedness and Creativity focuses on music. This attitude toward music is very different from the attitude in the literature, which found that music in the West is regarded as an educational requirement (Dai & Schader, 2002). In the United Kingdom, for example, music is a national curricular requirement, and children are encouraged by their teachers at school or their parents at home to play and study music (Welch et al., 2004).

The Mosque Imams' participants presented a clear view regarding performing or listening to music. Unlike the teachers group, the Mosque Imams' personal views and Islamic judgment seemed to be consistent. It is not surprising to find that religious participants do not accept performing or listening to music. Religion (Islam) plays

an important role in the lives of Saudis and is the State identity, and all regulations and legislations are derived from Islamic law. Saudis in general appreciate religious scholars and take their advice and recommendations seriously. The dominant perspective in Saudi Arabia concerning performing or listening to music is that it should be prohibited (Ibn Baz, 1987; Ibn Jebreen, n.d.). It is interesting to find that one famous Saudi religious scholar, AlKalbani, permits performing and listening to music, whereas the majority of Saudi religious scholars prohibit it. This finding may explain the strong rejection by religious scholar participants in this study of AlKalbani's perspective. However, comparing the views of the participants in the current study with the perspectives of Muslims in other countries demonstrates that there are inconsistencies regarding this view. For example, the Jordanian people, to some degree, have not perceived sinfulness in practicing or listening to music (Adely, 2007). AlQaradawi (1999), a famous Egyptian religious scholar, has permitted performing or listening to music. In addition, it could be argued that AlKalbani was more convinced by other religious scholars' perspectives that permit performing or listening to music (Al-Gazzali, 1058-1111 AD; AlQaradawi, 1999; Ibn Hazm, 994-1063 AD).

The subject that has significant agreement among all participants in the current study is singing without musical instruments. This concurrence may be understandable if we know that there is less debate among Muslim religious scholars regarding the prohibition of singing without musical instruments. Although Ibn Baz and Ibn Jebreen have only permitted women to sing and play the *def*, it could be argued that the significant agreement between Muslim scholars in the past and in the present may allow some Saudi males to regard singing by the two genders as *halal*. The only exception the participants mentioned is that these songs should not include obscenities and vulgar language.

Giftedness in performing music and singing are commonly associated with the characteristics of gifted children in the literature (e.g., Clark, 1997; Kitano & Kirby, 1986; Porter, 2005; Renzulli, 1978; Silverman & Baska, 1993; Van Tassel-Baska & Benbow, 1998). However, the lack of appreciation for musical ability or a hesitancy to associate them with the gifted in Saudi Arabia may explain why Saudis may not appreciate performing music for religious reasons, though some appreciate it personally. The current results affirm the fact that ignoring culture could result in the misidentification of gifted children. In addition, "in assessing giftedness, we must take cultural origins and contexts into account" (Sternberg, 2007, p.160). Saudi society has been perceived by a number of Saudi researchers as a conservative culture (Al-Asmari, 2008; AlFahaid, 2002). Burkhart and Goodman (1998), from an outsider perspective, state that "the Saudi society remains one of the world's

most conservative” (p.22). The uniqueness of Saudi culture, which is regarded by both insider and outsider perspectives as a deeply religious and conservative culture, may influence the perceptions of the participants in the current study toward gifted education and may influence those appreciated characteristics that might be associated with gifted children in Saudi Arabia.

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The current study suffers from a number of limitations, which may affect the generalizability of the current results. First, the current study attempted to explore a very debatable topic (performing/ listening to music) in Muslim countries in general and in Saudi Arabia in particular. In addition, to the best of my knowledge, this study is the first attempt to explore the perception of Saudis toward music and musically gifted children. Therefore, the participants may be hesitated to be more involved during interview sessions. For example, all participants refused to record their comments and instead they allowed the author to write down their responses. Second, because of the small number of the participants one cannot draw conclusions and generalization of the current results. Finally, the exploratory qualitative study and the methods used limit the generalizability of the findings (Huck & Cormier, 1996). Using convenience sampling method may have led to join or listen to persons who may have inadequate information regarding the topic. It is safe to admit that the perceptions of the rest of the population would not be feasible in this study. It is recommended that using mixed methods including probability random sampling techniques to include a large number of the target population should be conducted. Further research should also be explored the perceptions of females, musically gifted and a large number of religious scholars inside and/or outside Saudi Arabia to obtain more comprehensive picture which allows us to generalizing the finding.

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