


Spring 4-9-2019

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SAUDI WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN GRADUATE ENGLISH PROGRAMS IN TWO INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS: SAUDI ARABIA AND THE UNITED STATES

Kholod Sendi

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by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Linguistics**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May, 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful to my dissertation chair, Dr. Lois Meyer. I have known her since 2012. She was my academic advisor in my master's program, and I was her student in four courses. It has been such an honor to learn from her. There are no words that can express my appreciation and gratitude for all she has done for me. Without her support, invaluable academic input, and insightful advice this dissertation could not be completed.

I also extend deep appreciation to my committee members: Dr. Ziarat Hossain, Dr. Bee Chamcharatsri and Dr. Feroza Jussawalla for their time and commitment.

Also, I want to thank the Saudi female participants who generously volunteered to make this study possible. I am extremely humbled and grateful for their time and for sharing with me their educational experiences.

I am thankful to my family (my husband and daughters) for their love, encouragement, support, and patience throughout this journey. I am also thankful to my parents who always encouraged me to fulfill my dreams. I thank my mother—my first teacher; without her encouragement and her prayers, I would not be where I am today.

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ABSTRACT

Although there are a significant number of Saudi females pursuing graduate degrees in Saudi Arabia and abroad, few studies have examined their educational experiences. This qualitative multi-case study examines the educational experiences of ten Saudi females who graduated with a master's degree in an English language related field in two international contexts: American universities and Saudi universities. By conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews and document analysis, this study explored the challenges these two groups faced and the strategies they used to succeed in higher education institutions in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. This study discusses the roles that culture, religion, gender, and the English language play in these Saudi women's academic experiences. In addition, this research sheds light on how these two groups' educational experiences in two dissimilar international contexts influenced their views, values, and concepts of education and their personal identities as Saudi women.

In each case, Saudi female participants faced different challenges and opportunities. The five Saudi female participants in the first case, those who graduated from American universities, were supported academically more than culturally, socially, and religiously. In contrast, the five Saudi female participants in the second case, those who graduated from Saudi universities, were supported culturally, socially, and religiously more than academically. To overcome their challenges, in both cases the participants were resilient. In addition, the Saudi female students who graduated from American universities experienced the racial/ethnic diversity and gender integration of U.S. classrooms and society and developed intercultural competence. In both cases, pursuing a graduate degree (and facing different challenges along the way) was a transformational journey that helped all the participants grow personally and academically. Based on this study's findings, recommendations are presented for empowering Saudi female graduate students and enhancing their academic success in higher education both in Saudi Arabia and in the United States.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia is a Middle Eastern country located in Southwest Asia. It has a religious importance in the Muslim world for being the home to the holy city of Makkah where Muslims from all over the world go for pilgrimage. Women's higher education in this conservative country has undergone many changes and improvements in its history. One of the important developments in Saudi higher education is the increasing number of Saudi females pursuing graduate degrees, not only at public Saudi universities, but also abroad (Saudi Ministry of Higher Education, 2014). For example, the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education reported that in 2013, there were 24,498 Saudi women who were pursuing graduate studies in Saudi public universities compared to 19,364 female graduates in 2012 (Saudi Ministry of Higher Education, 2014). In addition, in 2005, Saudi women started to travel to the U.S. in significant numbers after the launching of the King Abdullah Scholarship program (KASP) (Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern, 2015). This program has enabled more than 145,000 young Saudis to travel abroad to pursue higher education, and the majority of these students are currently studying in the United States. Interestingly, "Saudi women make up 43% of all Saudi students" who study in American universities (Hausheer, 2014, p. 6).

Saudi Arabia has a very unique cultural and religious identity that has shaped and influenced Saudi women and Saudi education. Although Saudi Arabia and the United States share many economic and political interests, there is a huge cultural and educational gap between the two countries as a result of geographical distance, differences in religion, language and ideologies (Muyidi, 2015). Thus, because of the significant number of Saudi

females who are pursuing graduate studies at both Saudi and American universities, this qualitative study looks at the educational experiences of Saudi women who graduated with a master's degree in English from the two totally different educational systems of these two countries, the United States (U.S.) and Saudi Arabia.

Problem Statement

There is an extensive body of literature on international students in the United States. However, according to Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015), the “existing studies on international students have focused on international students in general (using a mixed sample from many different countries), or have focused primarily on Asian students” (p. 21). Although there is a significant number of Saudi students studying abroad, there has been very little research on Saudi students (Alhazmi, 2010, Alqefari, 2015; Altamimi, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Shaw, 2009); more specifically, the experiences of Saudi women studying abroad remain unexplored (Altamimi, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015).

Saudi students have very unique experiences compared to other international students (Altamimi, 2014; Shabeeb, 1996). First, Saudi students come from a somewhat unfamiliar and conservative culture that is segregated by gender. Second, most Saudi students who study abroad are sponsored by the Saudi government. “They therefore have less issues relating to such concerns as finding accommodation, employment and struggling with course fees” (Alhazmi, 2010, p. 2). Third, most Saudi women should be accompanied by a male family member, such as the husband, brother, or father; many of them come with their children. Consequently, they may have different experiences than international students who travel alone without the support of family. “As social isolation, loneliness, and lack of

support are common maladies of international students, Saudi women may have a very different experience due to the presence of family support in their host country” (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015, p. 4). These unique circumstantial distinctions create different adjustment problems for Saudi students when compared to other international students.

In addition to the lack of literature on the educational experiences of Saudi females at American universities, there is a lack of literature on Saudi females’ experiences in graduate programs, more specifically, English graduate programs, at Saudi universities, (Abo Alola, 2015; Alkhowaiter, 2017; Alzoman & Alarifi, 2016). Although there is a significant number of Saudi females studying in public graduate programs in Saudi Arabia, there has been very little research on their educational experiences. The few studies that have examined Saudi women’s educational experiences in Saudi graduate programs focused only on the academic challenges that they faced at Saudi universities. These studies did not shed light on social or cultural challenges that may affect Saudi female educational experiences. Also, these studies have not discussed the strategies of success and how students were able to overcome the challenges they faced (Abo Alola, 2015; Alkhowaiter, 2017; Alzoman & Alarifi, 2016). This study finally brings Saudi women’s voices into the literature, greatly enriching the literature on Saudi female graduate students at American universities and Saudi universities.

Moreover, because of the huge cultural gap between Saudi Arabia and the United States, there are various stereotypes and vast misunderstandings about Saudi women who are portrayed in Western media as oppressed with no rights (Ahmad, 2014; Muyidi, 2015). This study challenges the stereotypes about Saudi female graduate students by examining their educational experiences in both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this multi-case study is to examine the educational experiences of two groups of Saudi female students: those who graduated with a master's degree in an English language related field from American universities, and those who graduated with a master's degree in an English language related field from Saudi universities. This study explores the challenges these two groups faced and the strategies they used to succeed in higher education institutions in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. Also, this study provides an understanding of the roles that culture, religion, gender and the English language played in these Saudi women's academic experiences in both national contexts. Moreover, this research sheds light on how these two groups' educational experiences in these two dissimilar international contexts influenced their views, values, and concepts of education.

The central research question of this study is:

- What are the educational experiences and the perceptions of two different groups of Saudi women: those who graduated with a master's degree in an English language related field from American universities, and those who graduated with a master's degree in an English language related field from Saudi universities?

The sub-questions that will further specify the central question are:

- What are the difficulties and barriers that these Saudi female students faced in higher education in the United States and in Saudi Arabia?
- What are the strategies they used to overcome the barriers?
- What roles did culture, religion and gender play in Saudi female students' academic experiences in both of these academic contexts?

- How did these two groups' educational experiences in these two different contexts influence their views, values, and concepts of education and their personal identities as Saudi women?

Significance of the Study

This study suggests some implications and discusses strategies that can help future Saudi female students overcome the challenges they may face in their academic journey in both Saudi Arabia and the United States. In both countries, this study can help to identify points of academic strength and weakness from the perspective of Saudi female graduate students. For example:

- 1) This study suggests some implications to improve women's education in Saudi Arabia, more specifically, women's graduate English programs in Saudi universities.
- 2) This study can help improve the pre-departure orientation that is provided by the Saudi Cultural Mission in Saudi Arabia to those women who will study abroad. This pre-departure orientation aims to advise Saudi students before they leave Saudi Arabia about living and studying in the United States. The goal is to reduce or avert culture shock when they arrive in the United States.
- 3) Administrators of language programs and international student services, and educators who teach Saudi female students in the United States, will gain awareness in identifying the challenges faced by their Saudi female students. By identifying the challenges, instructors will be more able to meet these students' needs, create more effective orientation programs, and be more culturally sensitive when teaching and interacting with these students.

- 4) Although there is significant research about international students studying in the United States, few scholars have addressed the experiences of Saudi female students studying abroad (Alhazmi, 2010, Alqefari, 2015; Shaw, 2009). In addition, few scholars have addressed the experiences of Saudi female students studying in graduate programs at Saudi public universities. This study contributes by bringing Saudi female students' voices to the literature. To my knowledge, this is the first multi-case study that examines Saudi female graduate students' experiences in Saudi Arabia and in the United States.
- 5) This study challenges the stereotypes about Saudi women, who often are portrayed in media as voiceless victims who are oppressed, by examining their experiences in the two different educational contexts of Saudi Arabia and the United States.

Theoretical Framework: Postcolonial Feminism

Muslim women, Saudi women specifically, are misrepresented within Euro-American media. Saudi Arabia's history of gender segregation and veil, for example, have been focal points for Western gaze. The image of Saudi women in Western media tends to homogenize them and isolate them from their specific social, historical, economic, and ideological contexts. Thus, I draw on postcolonial feminist theory to understand the experiences of Saudi female participants in this study. Understanding the experiences of Saudi women requires an analytic lens that does not assume sameness, but instead acknowledges the complexity of their lives, and honors their interpretations and views of their own culture, history, religion, and education. Before discussing postcolonial feminist theory and its views on Muslim women, it is important to discuss briefly how Islam views women. Thus, the rest of this chapter will discuss the following: women in Islam and postcolonial feminist theory; this

theory's views on Muslim women in the Middle East and Third World countries and how Muslim women were represented in Western discourse based on the power relation between the West and the East.

Women in Islam

According to Abdul Azeem (1995), prior to the adoption of Islam, women in Arabic societies had no rights. Pre-Islamic Arabs buried female children alive because a female child was considered as a source of shame for her family. Women had no right to accept or refuse marriage, and they had no right to remarry if their husbands divorced them. At the same time, men had the right to marry as many wives as they wanted with no limits. Women could not own property or inherit; they themselves were inherited like any property after the death of the husband (Abdul Azeem, 1995).

On the other hand, Islam honored women by giving them all their rights over fourteen hundred years ago. "Islam projected a woman as being comparable to a man, and embodied the philosophy of being both equal and different" (Al-Mannai, 2010, p. 85). In this section, I briefly discuss some rights that Islam has given to women. To facilitate the discussion, I summarize the position of women from a spiritual, economic, social, and political standpoint based on "Women's Rights in Islam" (n.d.) and Abdul Azeem's (1995) study.

First, from the spiritual aspect, men and women are equal spiritually. Men and women have the same rewards for good deeds and the same punishments for sins. "The Quranic view of women is no different than that of men. They, both, are God's creatures whose sublime goal on earth is to worship their Lord, do righteous deeds, and avoid evil and they, both, will be assessed accordingly" (Abdul Azeem's, 1995, p.7). In the area of economic rights, there is no difference between men and women regarding the ownership of

any property. If the woman owned any property prior to marriage, she will keep that property under her control after marriage. Also, the woman keeps her own last name, and her own identity. Also, her husband is the one who is responsible for financially supporting the family. “No matter how rich the wife might be, she is not obliged to act as a co-provider for the family unless she herself voluntarily chooses to do so” (Abdul Azeem’s, 1995, p.16). In addition, Islam does not prevent women from working or to have a profession.

From the social aspect, Islam treated women as daughters, mothers, and wives. As a daughter, Islam stopped the barbaric practice of pre-Islamic Arabs who used to bury female daughters alive. Instead, “Prophet Muhammad promised those who were blessed with daughters of a great reward if they would bring them up kindly” (Abdul Azeem’s, 1995, p.8). Also, Prophet Muhammad ordered all Muslims to not favor their sons over their daughters (“Women's Rights in Islam,” n.d.). Regarding the woman as a wife, the acceptance of the woman to her marriage is a prerequisite for the validity of marriage in Islam. If a divorce becomes necessary, “she can end the marriage through Khul’a [*the right for a woman to divorce herself from her husband*], and she can sue for a divorce” (Abdul Azeem, 1995, p. 19). Another point to mention in this context is polygamy. In fact, Islam limited the practice of polygamy that existed before Islam and established very strict conditions for guidance. The only verse in the Qur’an that speaks about polygamy, speaks about limiting, not encouraging, polygamy (“Women's Rights in Islam,” n.d.). “No one can force a woman to marry a married man. Besides, the wife has the right to stipulate that her husband must not marry any other woman as a second wife” (Abdul Azeem, 1995, p. 27). In addition to treating a woman as a daughter and a wife, Islam highly appreciates the woman as a mother. “In Islam, the honor, respect, and esteem attached to motherhood is unparalleled. The Qur’an

places the importance of kindness to parents as second only to worshipping God” (Abdul Azeem, 1995, p. 23).

Two other issues to discuss from the social aspect are the veil or hijab and education. First, the veil did not exist in Islam only, but also in Judaism and Christianity. It is not to humiliate the woman, but to provide her a kind of protection. A woman with a veil is than respected for her intellectuality and spirituality more her sexuality. Second, education is a duty, not merely the right, of every Muslim, male and female (Abdul Azeem, 1995). Islam emphasizes the importance of education for women in all stages of her life. The woman in Islam “has the right to argue even with the Prophet of Islam himself. No one has the right to instruct her to be silent” (Abdul Azeem, 1995, p. 9). In addition, Al-Hariri (1987) stated: “The interest and keenness of the Prophet for female education is manifested in the fact that, in order to impart lessons of religion and morality, he himself used to hold classes for women” (Al-Hariri, 1987, p. 52).

From a political aspect, women have the right to vote in Islam. In the time of Prophet Mohammad, women participated in what is called *bay'ya* just like men. That means that they were voting for the Prophet as the head of state; they accepted him as their president and they would follow him. So, women participated in law making, and they participated not only in public affairs, but on the battlefield, too (“Women's Rights in Islam,” n.d.).

Finally, unfortunately, not all Muslim women in the Islamic world enjoy all the rights granted to them by Islam. “Almost all Muslim societies have, to one degree or another, deviated from the ideals of Islam with respect to the status of women” (Abdul Azeem, 1995, p. 35). According to Abdul Azeem, (1995), some societies have conservative and restrictive views toward women based on traditions and customs that deprive women of their rights.

Cultural practices, such as: banning women from obtaining an education, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and honor killing are all un-Islamic practices (Abdul Azeem, 1995; Gomaa, 2013). Therefore, it is important to differentiate between the actual Islamic teachings and the different cultural practices that deprive women of their rights. Unfortunately, because of these different cultural practices, one of the most common criticisms against Islam is that it treats women unjustly. Abdul Azeem (1995) stated: “Islam still has so much to offer today's woman: dignity, respect, and protection in all aspects and all stages of her life” (Abdul Azeem, 1995, p. 38).

The next part of this chapter will discuss postcolonial feminist theory. Also, it will discuss postcolonial feminists' views on Muslim women in the Middle East and Third World countries, and how Muslim women were represented in Western discourse. However, because postcolonial feminism is part of the third wave of U.S. feminism, the following section briefly discusses the three waves of U.S. feminism.

Brief Overview of U.S. Feminism

The presence of the feminist movements has made a significant difference in American women's lives and American women's education (Gordon, 1990; Solomon, 1985). U.S. feminism is commonly traced by using three *waves* to describe the chronological and conceptual development of these movements. However, these three waves are not static but rather fluid. The first wave took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and was engendered by the women's suffrage movement that called for equal rights and especially political power. It began at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 in New York to protest the limited social, political, and educational rights women had in the United States at the time. This wave focused on giving women the right to participate in voting and making

laws. However, it attracted mainly White middle-class women, and it tended to overlook other minority women (Nicholson, 2010; Rampton, 2015, Zamani, 2003).

According to Nicholson (2010) and Rampton (2015), the second wave began in the 1960s and lasted into the 1990s. It focused on family, workplace, sexuality, and reproductive rights. This phase melded with other anti-war and civil rights movements of the time and all were characterized as being radical. The feminists of this wave were against feminine beauty that reduced women to objects exploited by patriarchy. In this view of feminism, sex was a desire not confined to marriage; the feminists of this wave called for dismantling the institution of marriage and the nuclear family (Mahmood, 2005). The second wave of feminism also included a shift from domestic to global issues. Feminists of this wave called for global sisterhood and solidarity; they spoke for all women as a universal social class who shared oppression (Rampton, 2015). Many goals of the second wave were met. This wave gave women positions of leadership in higher education in the United States (Nicholson, 2010; Rampton, 2015). Another contribution of this wave was the creation of women's studies programs, which spread as an academic field on U.S. campuses. In addition, there was a growth of feminist journals and publishing houses (Nicholson, 2010; Rampton, 2015). By the early 1990s, the second wave of U.S. feminism began to recede (Nicholson, 2010).

The third wave began in the mid-1990s (Nicholson, 2010; Rampton, 2015). Contrary to their mothers' view who belonged to the previous U.S. feminist wave, this wave readapted feminine beauty for women as subjects, not as objects dominated by patriarchy. They celebrated sexuality as a way of women's empowerment. Most of the feminists of this third wave refused to be identified as feminists. Also, this wave of feminists supported equal rights, but, unlike second wave feminists, they did not have collective objectives (Rampton,

2015). Differences in class, race, and ethnicity were recognized in this wave. The important contribution of this wave is that it includes a critique of the White feminist movement by feminists of color and postcolonial feminists (Carby, 1985; Hooks, 1992; Lewis & Mills, 2003; Loomba, 1993; Lorde, 1983; Mohanty, 2006; Morris & Spivak, 2010)

Postcolonial Feminism

The monolithic description of Muslim women as oppressed has existed since colonial times (Ameri, 2012; Kahf, 1999); it has since been widely generalized by Western feminists (White middle-class feminists). However, postcolonial feminism has challenged this image of Muslim women in the Middle East and Third World countries. Before discussing postcolonial feminists' critique of Western feminism in the Middle East and Third World countries, it is important to mention that this Western feminism was also critiqued by feminists of color in the West. Feminists of color (Carby, 1985; Hooks, 1992; Lorde, 1983) criticized the White mainstream feminism of the second wave for being focused on the experiences of White middle-class Anglo-American women only. It ignored the hardships of poverty and racial discrimination that women of color have faced.

Many postcolonial feminists argued that Western feminism is inapplicable in non-Western countries. In her famous article, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse* (1988), Mohanty criticized Western feminist research in Third World countries. She discussed that Western feminist writing on women in Third World countries:

colonizes the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular 'third world Woman'- an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist

discourse. I argue that assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the 'third world' in the context of a world system dominated by the West on the other, characterize a sizable extent of Western feminist work on women in the third world. (Mohanty, 1988, p. 51)

Western feminists' research treated women in the Middle East and Third World countries as a single group that share oppression (Mohanty, 1988). They ignored the complexity and the diversity of women's experiences. For example, this feminism assumed sameness among the experiences of women in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan. The experiences of women in these countries are totally different from one another due to their varied religious, historical and political contexts.

In addition, Western feminist analysis of women's issues in the Middle East and Third World countries isolated gender from its cultural, historical, political, and religious contexts. It ignored that also capitalism and colonialism shape women's identity and affect gender roles (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Al-Sarrani & Alghamdi, 2014; Al-Sibai, 2015; Crowley, 2014; Dixon, 2011; Lewis & Mills, 2003; Loomba, 1993; Mohanty, 2006; Morris & Spivak, 2010).

Western feminist misrepresentation of Arab women forms limited categories of analysis that use a gender lens, which isolates gender from its social, political, and historical contexts. This leads to a very limited understanding of the big picture of women's lives and the dilemmas they are facing. (Al-Mannai, 2010, p. 85)

Therefore, Western feminists' analysis of women failed to understand women's experiences in non-Western societies, especially Muslim Arabic societies.

Moreover, Western feminism ignored the influence of Western imperialism and exploited many stories of 'oppressed' women in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan to justify U.S. wars. For example, Malala Yousafzai's story in Pakistan "serves only to validate white feminism's priorities and perceptions of otherised women, as in need of saving, as grateful recipients of foreign interventions" (Fancois-Cerrah, 2015, para. 19). Western feminism's analysis overlooked the influence of U.S. wars that caused poverty and violence in such countries.

Many Islamic practices, such as wearing the veil and forbidding intimate relationships outside of marriage, were interpreted by this feminism as a sign of oppression and control of women's bodies (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Lewis & Mills, 2003; Mahmood, 2005). Wearing the veil has different meanings and takes different forms in different Islamic communities. It is affected by history, region, class, piety, and politics. For example, "while there may be a physical similarity in the veil worn by women in Saudi Arabia and Iran, the specific meaning attached to this practice varies according to the cultural and ideological context" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 63). Women may wear the veil to be close to God, to represent national identity, or to resist Westernization and colonialism. However, all these meanings of wearing the veil were overlooked by Western feminists.

In addition, rather than acknowledging that not all women have the same perception of gender roles or have the same desires, White mainstream feminism imposed its values and beliefs on all Muslim women (Lewis & Mills, 2003). It ignored that freedom and modernity do not mean the same for all women (Deeb, 2006; Mahmood, 2005). Calling for a global

sisterhood and playing the role of the savior are two aspects of this feminism that were criticized by postcolonial feminist theorists (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Freedman, 2002; Mcleer,1998). White mainstream feminism believed that it is an international feminism that should save, civilize and give voice to women in the Middle East and in other Third World countries.

Unfortunately, White mainstream feminism failed to acknowledge the real needs, strengths, and ability of Muslim women to speak for themselves.

Women have very different means of achieving their desired goals. Many young Muslim women choose to wear the chador, their traditional dress, to resist western sex stereotyping . . . Algerian women, during their revolution, used the chador to hide weapons, to carry guns . . . Chipko women's group in India who prevented a logging company from cutting down their local forest by hugging the trees and thus stopping the machines. If the trees were cut down, their livelihood and culture would have been threatened so they literally took the matter into their own hands. (Crowley, 2014, para. 29)

Western feminism's analysis produced a universal image of the superiority and hegemony of the West, and the inferiority and backwardness of the East (Mohanty, 1988). The following section shows how Muslim women were represented historically in Western discourse based on the power relationship between the West and the East.

Western Representations of Muslim Women

Historical overview. In her book, Kahf (1999) discussed the representations of Muslim women in Western discourses from medieval times to the early nineteenth century. Kahf examined the representation of Muslim women in many literary and travel books

written in different languages, including English, Spanish, French and Italian. The important point that Kahf made was that “the image of the Muslim woman in Western culture has been a changing, evolving phenomenon” (p. 4). The image of the Muslim woman as being victimized and oppressed by Islam has not always been the same in history. The representation of the Muslim woman in the West depended on many factors, including geographical location of the texts, the power relationship between Islam and the West, and the Western discourse on gender.

According to Kahf (1999), in European medieval times, Islam dominated the East and West. The Islamic empire was a formidable enemy and a source of threat for the Christian world. Therefore, “the Muslim woman in medieval literature typically appears as a queen or noblewoman wielding power of harm or succor over the hero” (p. 4). Then, the Renaissance narrative of Islam gradually became more moderate, especially with the expansion of European commerce and explorations and the Moors’ expulsions from Spain. Ultimately, with the decline of Islamic power and the increase of European power and resources, Renaissance literature represented the Muslim woman in some texts as a “wanton queen of old” and in other texts as a “helpless damsel” (p. 5). However, the idea of “otherness” and Western “superiority” did not exist yet, according to Kahf. The eighteenth century was later characterized by the colonial power of France and Britain in the Muslim World and the changing of Western ideologies toward gender roles (due to Western feminism). At this time, the image of the Muslim woman as oppressed and in need of being saved started to dominate Western discourse to justify colonialism (Kahf, 1999). Also in the eighteenth century, orientalist discourses on Muslim women began to dominate the Western representation of Muslim women.

Orientalism. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is a groundbreaking work that should be mentioned when discussing the Western representation of Arabs and Muslims. Briefly, orientalism, according to Said, is the production of knowledge from the eighteenth to the twentieth century by Western writers and travelers (orientalists) about the East (orient). Said Stated:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on. (p.2)

This Western-generated knowledge is "not value-free" (p.47); it embedded a Western hegemony and superiority over the East.

On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientalists; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things. (Said, 1978, p.49)

Said argued that there is a difference between producing knowledge by carefully analyzing and understanding the lives of other people for their sake and for the purposes of coexistence, and producing knowledge to control, dominate and exploit (p. xix). Orientalism is a theory of Western hegemony depicting the Oriental cultures as inferior and backward (p.7). In this

orientalist discourse, the oriental woman “never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history” (p. 6). Stereotypes about the Orient were recycled, taught in universities and found in bookstores in the United States and Europe. Unfortunately, these ideas were further reinforced in the electronic postmodern world by different media sources (TV, radio, movies, press, and internet). Said discussed:

One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media’s resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds. (p. 26)

Until today, these stereotypes, and especially stereotypes about Muslim women, are still dominating the Western media, as will be discussed in the next section.

Contemporary representation of Muslim women. Since the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, orientalist discourse on Muslim women has taken a new form. Islam is portrayed in contemporary Euro-American media as a backward and oppressive religion, and Muslim women are represented as either victims or survivors, that is, escapees of Islam. (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Ameri, 2012; Kahf, 1999). A new mass-market commercial publishing industry has occurred that promotes this image.

This industry commissions and promotes a genre of books that one can identify, and judge, by their covers. We see them at airport bookstores. The copycat images are of women wearing black or white veils, showing only their eyes...The titles are variations on a theme: *A True Story of Life behind the Veil in Saudi Arabia*; *Sold*; *One Woman’s True Account of Modern*

Slavery; My Forbidden Face; Without Mercy; Burned Alive; Married by Force. They are often personal stories. (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 79)

Books in this genre include memoirs or autobiographies whose writers had been oppressed and abused by their cultures and religion (Islam); they eventually escaped to the West to be saved (Abu-Lughod, 2013). According to Abu-Lughod (2013), despite the variety within this genre, “the genre is characterized by consistent themes: coercion and lack of consent, absence of choice, and unfreedom” (p.91). Also, this genre represents Islam as an oppressive religion that deprives women of their rights (Abu-Lughod, 2013, Ameri, 2012; Yaghi, 2015).

Ali's *Infidel* (2007) is an example of these popular memoirs. In her book, the author tells about her experience as a Muslim woman. Briefly, Ali was born in Somalia. Her father was politically active and, shortly after Ali was born, he was imprisoned for his opposition to the Siad Barre government. After he managed to escape, he and his family fled to live in Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, and finally settled in Kenya. Her mother suffered from depression, especially when her husband abandoned her to raise the children on her own. Ali endured a grievous childhood. She was beaten, oppressed and subjected to female genital mutilation. In 1992, Ali fled to the Netherlands to escape an arranged marriage. There she eventually was given freedom and asylum. She then left Islam because, she claimed, it is a religion that denies the rights of women.

I am not disputing that authors of these testimonies have experienced oppression and abuse in their lives in Muslim countries—women’s oppression is a harsh reality in all countries of the world. In addition, it is not my intention to defend some cultural practices that are harmful and support violence against women, such as banning women from obtaining an education, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and honor killing. All

these practices are abusive and are inflicted against humanity. My disagreement with this genre stems from blaming Islam and representing it as a religion that deprives women of their rights. Ameri (2012) stated: “[I]n many of these memoirs the experiences of suffering of Muslim women are treated simplistically, pointing the accusing finger at Islam for all the problems that typically have complex causes” (p. 70). In addition, the production and reception of these memoirs have a significant role in reinforcing the orientalist attitudes (Said, 1978), colonial discourse, and White mainstream feminist views about Muslim women in the East—a discourse that portrays Muslim women as victims with no agency in need to be saved and civilized by the West.

The special packaging of these memoirs and the circumstances of their production and reception can reinforce the misconception that women's oppression under Islam is the only story and the whole truth about Muslim women, and that any experience other than that of oppression for Muslim women in relation to Islamic culture is the exception. (Ameri, 2012, p.70)

Ali's book and many others written in the same genre of blaming Islam as the oppressor of women, portraying Muslim women as victims or survivors and Muslim males as abusive, have been warmly welcomed by publishers in the West. Abu-Lughod (2013) stated: “Unlike the many good ethnographies written by anthropologists about women's everyday lives in these countries, these memoirs of suffering by oppressed Muslim women enjoy spectacular and strangely enduring popularity” (p. 95). Many postcolonial feminists argued that these books are very appealing to the target audience, European and North American readers, because they reinforce the readers' preexisting perspective about Muslim women, especially “when Islam has been racialized in America and Europe” (Yaghi, 2015. p. 86).

These preexisting views are the traditional orientalist views that the Western readers already have and that attack “the Arab and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women’s rights” (Said, 1978, p. xix). In fact, some of these memoirs are taught and widely read by many Western feminist academics (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Yaghi, 2015). Ali became a celebrity, and her book was a bestseller. She was praised for her ability and bravery to stand up for her ideas, and she received many awards (Abu-Lughod, 2013, Ameri, 2012; Yaghi, 2015).

The arguments and contentions promoted by authors of this genre seem to be more authentic and considered as an absolute reality about *all* Muslim women because they [*authors of this genre*] are considered “native informants” or cultural insiders (Abu-Lughod, 2013, Ameri, 2012; Yaghi, 2015). In other words, since the writers of this genre are cultural insiders, they are considered representative of all Muslim women, and the oppressive practices they experienced are considered the norm in Muslim societies. Yaghi (2015) stated:

In spite of her lack of scholarly credentials and academic qualifications ‘to speak authoritatively about Islam and the Arab world,’ Stephen Sheehi writes, Ali has been accepted in the West as a scholar, feminist activist, and reformer primarily on the grounds of her ‘insider claims about Islam’. (p. 85)

Ali’s “signature intellectual style” that can be seen in her works is characterized by connecting “decontextualized verses” from Qur’an with women’s abuse (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 102). Depending on a simple literalist reading of Qur’anic verses, Ali ignored centuries of interpretations of Qur’an (Abu-Lughod, 2013) by diverse Islamic scholars who belong to different schools of Islam and whose academic discipline is *tafsir*, the science of interpreting Qu’ran. According to Ameri (2012), who analyzed Ali’s *Infidel* (2007), “Hirsi Ali tends to

overgeneralize about Islam and Muslim people or presents her own ideas and information about Islam as truth” (p. 79). Ameri (2012) continued:

The following statements in the memoir are examples of such over-generalizations or definitive and unmodified assertions about Islam and Muslims: 'It was unIslamic to fall in love' (Hirsi Ali 2007, 127); 'women in all Muslim countries ... are married against their will' (Hirsi Ali 2007, 192); about 9/11 she says, 'It was not Islam, it was the core of Islam' (Hirsi Ali 2007, 269); or 'every devout Muslim approved of it [what happened at 9/11]' (Hirsi Ali 2007, 270); 'True Islam, as a rigid belief system and a moral framework, leads to cruelty' (Hirsi Ali 2007, 272); or 'I said Islam is like a mental cage' (Hirsi Ali 2007, 285); 'Islam is submission. You should not argue' (Hirsi Ali 2007, 132); or 'innovation is forbidden for Muslims' (Hirsi Ali 2007, 271). All of these claims can be challenged based on the Quranic verses, historical information or even common sense. (p. 79)

As Ameri (2012) mentioned, Ali’s statements about Islam could be challenged by Qur’anic verses and Islamic scholars who have academic qualifications. However, challenging Ali’s views about Islam by analyzing her text, and citing Islamic and Qur’anic scholars, are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but there is a literature that critiqued Ali’s views about Islam, such as Abu-Lughod (2013), Ameri (2012) and Yaghi (2015).

In general, Ali’s book *Infidel* (2007) is divided into two parts: My Childhood and My Freedom. These two parts graphically illustrate the division between the tribal, backward and inferior Muslim world and the liberal, civilized superior West (Yaghi, 2015). In the first part, Ali described her experience as an oppressed Muslim woman in four countries: Somalia,

Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia and Kenya. In Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya, Ali blamed Islam for encouraging child marriage, forced marriage, honor crimes, and female genital mutilation. In Saudi Arabia, Ali suffered from discrimination because of her skin color. In fact, racism and tribalism are rejected by Islam (Elias, 2016). In addition, where practices such as child marriage, forced marriage, honor crimes, and female genital mutilation exist, they are *tribal cultural* practices - not Islamic ideal teachings - and are not practiced by *all* tribes or people in these African countries (Yaghi, 2015). For example, female genital mutilation/circumcision is a partial or total removal of the external genitalia of girls. It is a cultural practice in the Eastern, Western, and North-Eastern regions of Africa, and in some countries in Asia and the Middle East (World Health Organization, 2018). Some Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia “do not practice female circumcision at all” (Gomaa, 2013, p. 125). Female genital mutilation that is practiced in some Muslim countries is “practiced as a social custom (and not a religious matter)” (Gomaa, 2013, p. 125); there is no evidence in Qur’an that makes this practice obligatory (Gomaa, 2013). “Although female genital mutilation, a cross-cultural and cross-religious practice in East Africa, often is attributed to tribalism, Ali uses her story and others’ to attribute it to Islam” (Yaghi, 2015, p. 91). In addition, when Ali’s mother, sister, and then brother all suffered from psychological problems such as depression, Ali also blamed Islam. For Ali, poverty, illiteracy, and violence in these African countries were not a result of global inequality, imperialism and colonialism; they were all a result of Islam (Abu-Lughod, 2013).

Moreover, Ali shared memories of her childhood in Saudi Arabia- “God’s country, the homeland of the Prophet Muhammad” (Ali, 2007, p. 37)- when she was eight years old, in 1977. Her memoir provided the reader a vivid image of Saudi women at that time,. Just

like orientalist and Euro-American media discourse on Muslim women that project Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan as hot spots where women are oppressed, Ali used Saudi Arabia as a representative of Islamic law that oppresses women. According to Ali (2007), “Islamic law in Saudi Arabia treated half its citizen like animals, with no rights or recourse, disposing of women without regard” (p. 60). She believed, as her father told her, that “Saudis are as stupid as livestock” for following this law (p. 50); “they are sheep” (p. 52). Ali (2017) also strongly believed that this Islamic law promoted radical Islam that led to terrorism. She stated that Saudi Arabia has “the wells of extremist ideology from which terrorists drink long before they commit acts of violence” (Ali, 2017, para 27).

Ali (2007) informed her readers that “all the women” in Saudi Arabia were covered in black (p. 39). They were, Ali described, “humanlike shapes. The front of them was black and the back of them was black, too. You could see which way they were looking only by the direction their shoes pointed” (p. 40). Furthermore, women “must be in the care of a man” (p. 39). If a woman was alone with no man, she would be considered a prostitute. “None of the Saudi women we know went out in the street alone. They couldn’t: their husbands locked their front doors when they left their houses” (p. 48). If a woman was alone, no man would sell her anything and “no taxi driver would accept her in his car” (p. 39). Although the Saudi women in her neighborhood were rich, had servants and drivers, they were regularly beaten by their husbands. “You could hear them at night. Their screams resounded across the courtyards: ‘No! Please! By Allah!’ This appalled my father. He saw this horrible, casual violence as a prime example of the crudeness of the Saudis” (p. 47).

Ali’s strong attack on Saudi Arabia and her portrayal of Saudi women were based on her personal memories of more than forty years ago. As a Saudi woman, what struck me

most about Ali's portrayal of Saudi women was her inaccurate, exaggerated descriptions and sweeping generalizations. The contradiction in Ali's argument is problematic. While she suffered from discrimination in her neighborhood by Saudis, she was invited to their homes and played with their children in this same neighborhood. I question Ali's claim that "all the women" (p. 39) in Saudi Arabia wear only black, especially in Makkah (the city where Ali lived in Saudi Arabia). Makkah is known for its diversity because Muslims come to this city from all over the world for pilgrimage or for visiting the holy mosque. Muslim women in Makkah have different skin colors and wear different colors and styles of veil. Also, beating women or locking them at home is not the norm in Saudi Arabia. While women in Saudi Arabia should be veiled and have a male guardian, I have not heard from my Saudi older female relatives who witnessed life in Saudi Arabia in the seventies such tales. When I asked them about how women were treated in Saudi Arabia in the seventies, none of them mentioned that they were treated the way Ali (2007) described. None of them had witnessed any taxi driver or salesman refusing to deal with them because they were not accompanied by a man. In addition, I have read an extensive body of literature on Saudi women, I have not found any anthropologist or sociologist reported that Saudi women exposed to such oppressive practices in Saudi Arabia in the seventies (Al Munajjed, 2009; Al Munajjed, 2010; Yamani, 1996, Yamani, 2000; Baki, 2004). Instead, Saudi Arabia in the seventies and after the discovery of oil had witnessed openness to the West, and had more flexible rules and regulations regarding women's veil and gender segregation compared to the eighties after the Islamic revival movement (AlMoheni, 2017). I am not defending Saudi Arabia or defending any oppressive practices. Although Saudi Arabia is the home of the two holy mosques, Saudi people's practices in this country do not always represent the ideal teaching

of Islam. There are many cultural practices in Saudi Arabia that are not part of the ideal Islamic teaching, such as banning women from driving (as will be explained in Chapter 2). However, I question Ali's overgeneralizations when she portrayed Saudi women in Saudi Arabia.

Thus, my intention is not to devalue the experiences of Muslim or ex-Muslim women in these memoirs. My discomfort with this genre stems from the authors' use of similar tools that orientalist and White mainstream feminists use in their analysis of Muslim women. These methods include isolating gender from its cultural, historical, and political systems; ignoring the influence of Western imperialism; universalizing Western values; accusing Islam of being oppressive without deep knowledge of or corroboration from the Qur'an; treating Third World women as a single category with no agency, regardless of their home country or circumstance; assuming sameness and erasing complexity from Muslim women's lives; and imposing the idea of the superiority of the West and inferiority of the East, "the exotic other" (Yaghi, 2015). These bestselling books widen the gap between the West and the East, instead of creating a bridge between these dissimilar cultures. Ali's *Infidel* effectively reduced Muslim cultures to a dirty, barbaric, homogeneous and oppressive culture, and even diversity and plurality in American and European cultures are reduced to a "White, Judeo-Christian American culture" (Yaghi, 2015, p. 96). The message conveyed is that all Muslims should assimilate into this White mainstream culture. With the absence of careful and deep analysis, these books stigmatize entire cultures and introduce the Muslim identity as if it is "imposed on Muslim women" (Ameri, 2012, p. 73).

Finally, I hope that by basing this study in a postcolonial feminist theoretical framework I can introduce the Saudi female participants in this study in a way that does not

categorize them as victims of their culture or as survivors. Instead of speaking *for* them, my study gives them the opportunity to speak for themselves. I hope this study can open an intellectual space for the Saudi participants to voice their personal and critical views and interpretations of their educational experiences, and to discuss the challenges they faced and strategies of success they used. I draw on postcolonial feminist theory to understand the multiplicity, complexity and agency in the Saudi female participants' experiences. This theory enables me to understand the participants' interpretations and attitudes toward the mainstream U.S. perception of Saudi women as oppressed women, and toward wearing the veil and gender segregation in the Saudi society. Also, this theory provides an analytic lens that helps me understand how the participants see themselves as Saudi Muslim women. Do they see themselves as oppressed? How do their educational experiences in Saudi Arabia and in the U.S. influence their values and beliefs? I draw on postcolonial feminist theory to understand how the Saudi participants maintain their cultural and Muslim identities in this globalized world where the West (Western developed countries like the U.S.) has a cultural and intellectual influence over the rest (the East).

Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction to this study. It discussed the problem statement, purpose statement, the significance of the study, and the research questions. Also, this chapter presented my theoretical framework that guides this research. The next chapter presents the literature review that is relevant to this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of literature that is relevant to this study. This literature review has two important parts. The first part defines the historical, political, social, and educational context of Saudi Arabia in which Saudi women have found themselves, and it examines the past and the current social and economic developments that have shaped Saudi women's lives. Also, this part sheds light on English education in Saudi Arabia. Lastly the first part reviews some of the studies that have examined the educational experiences of Saudi female graduate students at Saudi universities.

The second part of this literature review gives a brief overview of American female education in the United States. While the United States continues to be culturally, ethnically, racially and religiously diverse, the second part discusses how multicultural education has been changing to meet the needs of this changing society (Gorski, 2015). Also, this part provides a review of literature about Saudi female students' experiences at American universities. By presenting these two parts, I hope my reader can have a clear picture of the two international contexts in which Saudi females have found themselves during their graduate educational experiences in both their local home country and their host country.

Part 1: Saudi Arabia

Historical and Political Background

Saudi Arabia has a central and dominant role among Gulf countries (Onsman, 2011; Profanter, 2014). It has religious importance in the Islamic world because it is home to the two holy cities of Makkah and Medina, where Islam was born and where Muslims from all over the world go for pilgrimage. "While Middle Eastern culture tends to have many

common elements throughout the Middle East, Saudi Arabia presents a much stronger or ‘purer’ interpretation of religious-cultural elements” (Profanter, 2014, p. 214). These Saudi strong and deep roots “in religious and tribal histories date back to the eighteenth century with joining of the first Ibn Saud to Muhammad ben Abdel Wahab” (Baki, 2004, p. 1). Ibn Saud was the ruler of Najd, the central region of Saudi Arabia, and Muhammad ben Abdel Wahab was a religious reformer at that time. According to Baki (2004), who traces the history of Saudi Arabia, these two powers had a great influence on the religious and cultural context of Saudi Arabia. In 1932, King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud laid the foundation for the modern state of Saudi Arabia. In addition, Saudi Arabia has no colonial past; it was not colonized by any Western power that affected the Saudi traditional and conservative nature.

The 1930s to the end of the 1970s was the period of the discovery and production of oil. “Oil and its resulting wealth had an unimaginable impact on Saudi Arabia in an extremely compressed period of time” (Hamdan, 2005, p. 43). In this period the country witnessed the influx of American presence and the establishment of Saudi Aramco (the Saudi Arabian Oil Company). The American engineers and oil executives also brought with them the Western lifestyle. American women were driving cars and shopping unveiled, which Saudi women could not do (Hamdan, 2005). “Foreign migrant labor accounted for 43 per cent of the total workforce in the mid-1970s” (Yamani, 1996, p. 265). Although this period was marked by changes for all Saudi citizens, women remained in a marginal position.

According to Yamani (1996), who details the history of Saudi Arabia at that time, the beginning of the 1980s was “marked by religious revival” (p. 265). The Islamic Awakening or revival (Sahwa) movement started in Iran in 1979, and it was a response to the European powers that colonized many countries in the Muslim world in the 20th century (Ozalp, 2018).

Influenced by the new idea of an Islamic state in which Islam could be implemented fully, thus ending the imperialism of the colonial West, Khomeini [*the founder of this movement*] argued it was incumbent on Muslims to establish an Islamic government based on the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad. (Ozalp, 2018, para. 22)

This movement influenced the Muslim World including Saudi Arabia, which witnessed more religious pressure. Saudi media carried more religious instructions than during the 1960s and 1970s (Yamani, 1996). People seemed less affected by Western influence, and there was a strong sense of a Saudi Muslim identity. In 1991, the government established “*Majlis Al Shura*, an appointed consultative council to allow more participation of people in the running of their country's affair” (Yamani, 1996, p. 267). The role of *Majlis Al Shura* was to propose laws to the King. It consisted of a head and sixty male members, but there was no female presence at all (Yamani, 1996).

High Degree of Cultural Homogeneity

Compared to the U.S, Saudi Arabia is religiously, culturally, and linguistically homogenous (El-Banyan, 1974). According to El-Banyan (1974), “Saudi Arabian people share four fundamental characteristics: (1) religion—they are all Muslim, (2) the Arabic language, (3) basic cultural traits, and (4) the centrality of the family in the social structure of the tribes, villages and urban areas” (p. 43). In addition, Metz (1992) described the Saudi population:

The population was characterized by a high degree of cultural homogeneity.

This homogeneity was reflected in a common Arabic language and in

adherence to Sunni Wahhabi Islam, which has been fostered within the political culture promoted by the Saudi monarchy. Above all, the cultural homogeneity of the kingdom rested in the diffusion of values and attitudes exemplified in the family and in Arabian tribal society, in particular the values and attitudes regarding relations within the family and relations of the family with the rest of society. (Metz, 1992, Cultural Homogeneity and Values section, para. 1)

Ethnically, 90% of Saudis are Arab, while 10% of Saudis are Afro-Asian (Saudis of mixed African and Asian ancestry) (The Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2018). Within Saudi society, people may describe themselves as *Qabali* (a person of a tribal ascendancy) or as *Khadari* (a person without a tribal ascendancy). Most Saudi people live in cities (83.5%), but there are Saudis who live in villages (CIA, 2018). Also, Saudis belong to different socioeconomic classes. However, Alnuaim's (2013) study discussed that the Saudi middle class "is the largest bloc within the Saudi class pyramid, as it occupies 66 percent of this pyramid approximately" (p. 35). (See Figure 2.1.) According to Alnuaim (2013), a middle-class family's monthly income ranges between SR7,700 and SR38,200 (\$2,053 and \$10,186). Alnuaim's (2013) study is the most recent study I found that examined the Saudi middle class. However, I think this percentage has decreased, especially after the reforms that took place in recent years and that changed the social and economic status of the Saudi society (these reforms will be discussed later in this literature review). Religiously, the majority of Saudi Muslims are Sunni. The estimated percentage of Shia Saudis in the country is 10%-15% (CIA, 2018). (Sunni and Shia are two sects of Islam.) In terms of age, 70% of the country's citizens are younger than 30 (Rasooldeen & Hassan, 2017). Finally, more than 30%

of the Saudi population are expats (CIA, 2018). Figure 2.2. shows the expat population in Saudi Arabia. Although the Saudi population is characterized by a high degree of cultural homogeneity, that does not erase complexity, multiplicity, and diversity among Saudi people. Saudi people have different views, attitudes, and beliefs based on their social class, region, family/tribal standards, education, and/or religious beliefs (conservative/liberal/moderate).

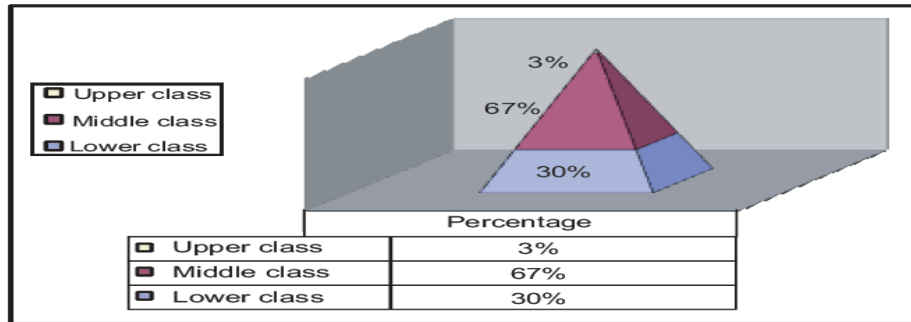


Figure 2.1. The Saudi class pyramid. Adapted from Alnuaim (2013, p. 53)

	Millions	Percentage
Syrian	2.48	23%
Indian	1.54	14%
Pakistan	1.06	10%
Egyptian	1.06	10%
Yemeni	0.94	9%
Bangladeshi	0.83	8%
Filipino	0.71	7%
Sri Lankan	0.65	6%
Indonesian	0.47	4%
Sudanese	0.47	4%
Jordanian/Palestinian	0.31	3%
Turkish	0.09	1%
Westerners	0.12	1%
Total Expatriates	10.74	100%

Figure 2.2. The expat population in Saudi Arabia. Adapted from Global Media Insight [GMI] (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.globalmediainsight.com/blog/saudi-arabia-population-statistics/>

Public Segregation, Veil and Mobility

Saudi society is segregated by gender; for example, all restaurants, including Starbucks, McDonalds, and other coffee shops, have sections for women. This separation of

sexes is seen also in banks and some government buildings. All the malls have many private shops for women only, where men are not allowed to enter. This gender segregation is also seen in the education system; there are schools, colleges and universities for female students only, and others for male students. Mixing of gender is seen in a few places, such as private companies or oil companies in the big modernized cities of the kingdom. Another important feature observed in the Saudi society is that most Saudi women are veiled. This veil consists of two pieces: The *abaya* is a loose over-garment that covers the whole body except the face and hands. The second piece is a scarf to cover the head. The abaya and scarf are traditionally in black but recently different colors have become acceptable. They can be worn with *Neqab* to cover the face except the eyes. Women are veiled when they go outside their homes or when in contact with male strangers, non-family (Yamani, 1996, p. 271), but many Saudi women do not cover the face.

The ideology behind gender segregation and wearing the black abaya is complex. It has its own history and different views among Saudi people. In her ethnographic study in Saudi Arabia, Le Renard (2014, p. 30-33) examined the concept of gender segregation. She discussed that before establishing the Saudi state, and before the discovery of oil, women participated in agricultural work and did not wear the traditional black veil (*abaya*). Only women from rich families stayed indoors; gender segregation was a sign of high status. However, after the establishment of the Saudi state, followed by the oil boom in the 1970s, gender segregation and wearing the black *abaya* was a sign of "Saudization", which means national identity. At that time, Saudi families had to move from rural areas to live in the cities to get benefits from the numerous new public-sector jobs after the oil boom. Thus, gender segregation was not only a sign of national identity, but also a national distinction (or

even a privilege) of Saudi women, in contrast to non-Saudi residents who flowed into the country after the oil boom and made up about half of the workforce. Therefore, many non-Saudis do not have to be segregated by gender. For example, most expats, especially Western expats, live in Western compounds in Saudi Arabia that are not separated by gender and where these expats can wear Western dress and enjoy a Western lifestyle (Tony, 2018). In addition, expatriate students, such as American, British, Indian, and Pakistani students, may enroll in gender-mixed, private, international schools in Saudi Arabia ("Education and Schools," n.d.).

In addition, gender segregation became more emphatic after the Islamic Awakening movement that influenced the Muslim world in the 1980s (Le Renard, 2014). According to some Islamic scholars in Saudi Arabia, the main purpose of gender segregation is to avoid any inappropriate interaction between sexes that could lead to a relationship outside the marriage, thereby posing a threat to the family structure (family has an important role in Islamic societies and Saudi society in specific (Wagemakers, 2016). On the other hand, some Islamic scholars argue that there is no single evidence from Qur'an and Sunnah, Prophet Muhammad's sayings and teachings, that required gender segregation or prohibited interaction between men and women in Islam. According to the Islamic code of morals, men and women can interact formally within a pure, modest and respectable atmosphere, avoiding any kind of physical touch and inappropriate talking or staring (Islamicfatwa, 2009).

There are many attitudes towards the veil among Saudi women. Many Saudi women "view veil not as a restriction, but as a normal feature of everyday life" (Yamani, 1996, p. 271). They wear it proudly as a social and/or religious duty, and to represent their dignity and Islamic identity. Some wear it as "an opportunity for women to achieve sanctity, privacy and

respect free from the demands and impositions of a capitalist consumer society that suffocates women's choices by treating them as objects of consumption" (Al-Sudeary, 2012, p. 533). On the other hand, there are many Saudi women who wear the veil out of habit, social pressure, and/or just to avoid the confrontations with the religious police (the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) is a government religious authority responsible for implementing Islamic rules. Many writers use the term "religious police " instead of the Committee's full name). Some women wear the scarf loosely on their head with their hair uncovered, and their *abayas* are open, revealing the clothes underneath. These women take off the veil as soon as they travel outside the country.

There are also differences in attitudes toward gender segregation among Saudis. While some Saudis think that this separation of sexes is a sign of a radical interpretation of Islam, others look at it more positively as a chance for veiled women to feel more comfortable in their private spaces. In "women only" places or no-men allowed settings, women have the chance to interact with other women more freely without wearing the veil. In their homes or in these private settings, Saudi women wear Western-style clothes and practice their everyday activities, such as raising children, managing businesses, teaching, swimming, etc. Saudi women's roles and activities in their own places are not visible or accessible to the Western media. What is visible to the Western media is the image of Saudi women wearing the black veil in public, which is interpreted as a sign of extreme oppression.

Another ordinance that Saudi Arabia was infamous for was its ban on female driving. Until 2017, Saudi Arabia was the only country in the world that did not allow women to drive. However, it is rarely mentioned that Saudi Bedouin (nomadic) women who lived in rural areas were allowed to drive. For decades, these women had been driving in the harsh

weather of the desert outside urban areas. These women were allowed to drive because “their families’ survival” depended on them. “While men are working, wives are tasked with taking the kids to school, transporting livestock to market, and managing the house. They also drive big tankers to bring drinking water to their villages” (Jawhar, n.d., para. 2). On the other hand, Saudi women who lived in cities were not allowed to drive except inside the compounds of Saudi Aramco and the King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals. Although there is no single evidence or clue that proves that Islam prevents women from driving, women’s driving was a complex issue in Saudi Arabia because Saudi men and women had different attitudes toward this issue (Al-Rashed, 2010). Those who supported women driving participated in different campaigns to defy the kingdom's ban on female driving (Fisher, 2013). However, all campaigns failed because there was no complete agreement on women’s driving among Saudis, males and females (Al-Rashed, 2010). Some Saudi men and women considered this ban to be a protection for women. Many Saudi women themselves simply did not want to drive. One of the surveys that had been conducted by Saudi students about women driving showed that “3,209 out of 3,710 Saudi women opposed changing the driving laws” (Abdel-Raheem, 2013, para. 10) in Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, there were a substantial number of Saudi men and women who agreed with women’s driving because they acknowledged that there were women who were divorced or widowed, and some had low income and did not have any male guardian to serve them, so they needed to drive their cars. Thus, gender segregation, wearing the veil, and female driving are very complex, and Saudis’ attitudes toward them varied according to their social class, region, family/tribal standards, and/or religious belief (Gorney, 2016). Also, age and exposure to life outside Saudi Arabia (such as studying abroad) can affect Saudi’s attitudes.

Saudi Women's Schooling

According to Saleh (1986), the roots of education in Saudi Arabia date back to the advent of Islam, when Makkah and Medina served as centers of knowledge from which knowledge was distributed to the Islamic world.

For centuries each year millions of pilgrims would flock to Mecca [*Makkah*] and Medina and these two cities constantly experienced an infusion of knowledge from these visitors. There people from the world over would come together exchanging ideas and knowledge. Sometimes pilgrims stayed and became teachers spending their time writing books and learning from other scholars, as well as teaching. (Saleh, 1986, p. 18)

Unlike Western societies that separate the church from the state, religion and culture dominate all aspects of life in Saudi Arabia, including its education and economy (Profanter, 2014).

In addition, Islam gave women the right to be educated. However, the history of women's education in Saudi Arabia shows the difficulties that women have faced to get their right to an education. Moreover, women's education system in Saudi Arabia is separated by gender. Mixing of gender is only allowed in kindergartens and in the medical schools, and recently in King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), which was built in 2009 (Al Alhareth et al., 2015).

Saudi primary, middle, and secondary education. Women's education has been a controversial issue in Saudi society. Until the establishment of the General Presidency of Girls Education (GPGE) in Saudi Arabia, women's education took place in three stages: informal, semi-formal, and formal education (Al Jadeed, n.d.). The first school that was

opened in Saudi Arabia in 1903 was for men only, and during that time women's education was informal. Girls received traditional schooling at home or by going to *Kuttab*. *Kuttab* is a school that usually took place in a local mosque where girls learned Qur'an and the basics of reading and writing "under a blind religious man or religious woman" (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991, p. 288).

From 1941 to 1959, women's education was semi-formal. There were around fifteen semi-formal schools (Al Jadeed, n.d.). These schools "offered to girls for the first time the curriculum of the Ministry of Education, which was in effect a boy's curriculum with addition of home economics, embroidery, English and sports" (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991, p. 288). The teachers in these schools were from neighboring countries.

Because of the increasing wealth of Saudi Arabia after the discovery of oil, and because the royal family was aware of the importance of formal female education for the development of Saudi Arabia, King Saud, and then King Faisal had very important roles in introducing and supporting women's education (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991; Hamdan, 2005). In 1959, King Saud issued a Royal Decree announcing the establishment of the General Presidency of Girls' Education (GPGE) to supervise all girls' schools (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991). This historical announcement was a turning point in the history of female education in Saudi Arabia and a starting point for the formal education for girls. It was followed by opening numerous girls' schools in the 1960s. The text of King Saud's speech, as cited in Al Rawaf & Simmons (1991, p. 288), includes:

Thanks be to God, we have decided to bring into effect the desire of the Ulama in Saudi Arabia, and to open schools to teach our girls the science of our religion from the Qur'an, and belief and *fuqaha* [religious instruction],

and other sciences which are in harmony with our religious beliefs, such as home economics and child rearing, and anything of which the effect on their belief will not make us fear for the present or for the future. The schools will not have any negative effect on our belief or behavior or customs. To this end, we order that a committee be set up, its members being drawn from the important Ulama, who we trust very much to organize this school, to decide on a program, and to see that it is carried out. (p. 288)

It is clear from this Royal Decree that women's education was based on religion, as it was supervised by *Ulama* (religious men in Saudi Arabia). In addition, the main purpose of female education was to prepare women for their traditional social role as wives and mothers.

To this end, there were three different attitudes toward female education among Saudi society (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991, 288):

- (a) The first attitude was that of Saudi conservative families who were against women's education because they believed that women's roles were only at home as wives and mothers. For them, female education was useless, and may be against the morality and modesty of women because their daughters would be taught by foreign teachers from neighboring countries where women had started taking off their veil and working with men. The families believed these teachers might affect their daughters negatively. The Royal Decree, mentioned above, tried to convince these conservative families, who are the majority of Saudis, that female education was not harmful for their daughters or against Islamic teachings;

- (b) The second attitude was that of families who allowed their daughters to go to school to get only the basic education that would be useful to them as wives and mothers;
- (c) The third group was supportive of women's education, but it was a minority group. They wanted their daughters to be educated and to get a college or university degree. Most of these families sent their daughters to private schools in other Arab countries for formal education prior to its introduction in Saudi Arabia. Many rich families did not wait until Saudi higher education opened for women, and they instead sent their daughters to study abroad (Hamdan, 2005).

In addition, it is important to mention that not only King Saud and his daughters supported women's education in Saudi Arabia, but also King Faisal (the king who came after King Saud) and his wife Iffat had an important role in convincing Saudi parents of the importance of female education. Actually, King Faisal rejected the idea that in order to modernize Saudi Arabia, its past would have to be erased. He believed that slow and gradual change was better than violent change. King Faisal understood the traditional thinking of his people. At the same time, he saw a need to enlighten his people's understanding of Islamic teachings regarding women's education (Hamdan, 2005).

However, in 1963, the Saudi government sent "official forces to break up demonstrations in Buraydah, where much of the opposition to girls' education took place. The citizens of this town had to be forcibly restrained from demonstrations when they heard of the plan to educate women" (Hamdan, 2005, p. 48). Although there were many Saudis

who refused women's education, the government went ahead to open more schools for girls, but it did not make female education compulsory (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991).

In addition, in order to ensure Saudi parents that education would not be harmful to their daughters, girls' schools, colleges and universities, until today, are built with some conditions. For example, each building is surrounded by high walls, and for each building there must be a male guardian in his 50s or 60s who is responsible for checking the identity of any person who enters the building and to make sure that the girls are safe until they are picked up by their fathers or brothers (Hamdan, 2005, p. 50). Further, schoolgirls in public schools are required to wear modest, full-length and long-sleeved uniforms (Alhamdan, 2015).

With the discovery of oil and the country's increasing wealth, the General Presidency of Girls Education (GPGE) by the mid-1970s was responsible for a new generation of educated mothers who wanted a better education for their daughters (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991). In the 1980s, the number of girls enrolled in schools was almost equal to the number of boys (Hamdan, 2005). In addition, families who used to send their female children to study abroad "became more reluctant to educate their children in the West, as schools in Saudi Arabia started having higher standards, offering subjects like computing and modern languages" (Yamani, 1996, p. 270). According to Hamdan (2002), GPGE and the Ministry of Education were combined in 2002. After this combination, the curriculum of girls' schools was identical to that of boys'; the main difference is that physical education and sports were replaced by home economics and embroidery for the girls. Only in 2017, physical education and sports were allowed in girls' schools (AL-Sulami & Radwan, 2017).

Unlike diversity that can be seen in American public schools and universities, Saudi educational institutions are more homogeneous. Because Saudi public schools are not administered by Western standards, only Saudi and other Muslim and Arabic students, such as Egyptians, Lebanese, Syrian, and Sudanese students, are allowed to attend these schools. On the other hand, expatriate students, such as American, British, Indian, and Pakistani students, may enroll in private international schools that are governed by their embassies. Unlike Saudi public schools that are separated by gender and focus mainly on teaching religion and the Arabic language, the private international schools are co-educational and they use English as a medium of instruction ("Education and Schools," n.d.).

Higher education. Women's attempts in Saudi Arabia to reach college level and higher education date back to the 1940s. Hamdan (2005) stated that in the 1940s, the Ministry of Higher Education began sending Saudi male students to study abroad while female students were not allowed. When Fatina Shakir wanted to have the same opportunity and was refused, Fatina and her father appealed to King Faisal, the supporter of women's education. Fatina finally became one of the very first Saudi women to hold a Ph.D. from an American university (p. 48).

The first university in Saudi Arabia was established in 1957 for men only; girls were allowed to join this university in 1961 (Al Sharari, 2008, para. 7). The first girls' college was established in 1970, and by 1989, twelve colleges produced more than 16,000 female graduates (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991). The government encouraged women to apply for colleges and universities by eliminating the strict requirements for admission. In addition, "the government offered a number of inducements in the form of a monthly allowance for students and gifts of money or land upon graduation" (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991, p. 292).

To this day, education in Saudi Arabia is free from the primary school to the doctoral level for both boys and girls. Also, the education system is still separated by gender. In girls' schools and universities, only female teachers are allowed in classrooms. Male professors teach by video link from a remote location; the students can see the professor, but he never sees them.

Although the Saudi government has made considerable efforts to support female education and to reduce the gender gap at all levels of education, women still have some restrictions. Despite the fact that 63% of students in higher education are female, most of them are enrolled in social sciences, humanities, and education (Onsman, 2011).

Unfortunately, female students who live in the Northern and Southern regions have fewer opportunities to access higher education than females who live in major regions such as Riyadh, Dammam and Jeddah because of “the distribution of universities and their branches between regions and provinces” (Al Alhareth et al., 2015, p.10-11).

Pedagogically, education in Saudi Arabia is based on traditional rote learning in which there is little emphasis on analytic, critical, and creative thinking (Al Alhareth et al., 2015; Grami, 2012; Profanter, 2014). “Even at university level, students do not carry out research and are expected to rely on lectures for their learning” (Al Alhareth et al., 2015, p.12). By implementing the teacher-centered approach, Saudi students have a passive more than active role in classrooms where there is a lack of discussion or interaction between students and teachers.

Because the majority of female students graduate in the fields of education and social services, this has created a gender imbalance in the Saudi workforce and has raised the rates of unemployment among Saudi women (Al Munajjed, 2009). Until recently it was unusual to

see a woman working in malls, hotels, or corporations and companies. Most of the employed Saudi women worked only in the field of education or medicine. In addition to these educational restrictions preventing women from full participation in the Saudi labor market, there are also some social restrictions. Saudi cultural and social customs play an important role in women's transition from school to work. Socially, the main role of women has been seen as good wives and mothers. Men are responsible for women's financial security even if the woman is wealthy in her own right. Conservative Saudis believe that women preserve the stability of the society by preserving society's basic unit, which is the family (Yamani, 2000). Furthermore, because gender segregation in Saudi Arabia is a cultural value, the jobs that do not separate gender, such as working in the field of medicine or working in oil companies such as Saudi Aramco, are not preferred by many conservative families. For example, nursing is not viewed as an honorable profession by many Saudi families because it forces women to mix with men, to stay long hours outside the home and to work night shifts, which is not acceptable and against the deeply rooted beliefs of some Saudi parents (Miller-Rosser, Chapman & Francis, 2006).

Although there is no distinction between men and women regarding the ownership of any property, Saudi women, socially but not religiously, have limited freedom to manage their businesses. It is very unusual to see a Saudi woman in the Ministry of Commerce or any government building. Saudi women would ordinarily send an authorized male representative to do the job on her behalf (Yamani, 1996). Table 2.1. compares the rights that Islam gives women, and some cultural and social practices that have restricted Saudi women, especially before the social and economic reforms of the Saudi 2030 Vision – these reforms will be explained later in this literature review.

Table 2.1.

Comparison Between the Rights Islam Gives Women and Some Cultural and Social Practices That Have Restricted Women in Saudi Arabia (Especially Before the Reforms of the Saudi 2030 Vision)

In Islam	Practices In Saudi Arabia
Education is a duty, not merely the right, of every Muslim, male and female.	The history of women's education shows the difficulties that women have faced to get an education.
There is no evidence in Islam that requires gender segregation or prohibits interaction between men and women.	Most of Saudi society is segregated by gender.
There is no evidence in Islam that bans women from driving.	Until 2017, women were not allowed to drive.
There is no distinction between men and women regarding the ownership of any property.	Women had limited freedom to manage their businesses. Saudi women would ordinarily send an authorized male representative to do the job on her behalf (Yamani, 1996).
Women have the right to work or have a profession.	It was unusual to see a woman working in malls, hotels, or corporations and companies. The gender-mixed jobs were not preferred by many conservative families.

The English Language in Saudi Arabia

The medium of instruction in Saudi schools is Arabic. English is the only foreign language taught to children at middle and high schools in Saudi public schools, while it is taught in private schools from the first grade. At the university level, English is taught as an academic discipline or as an introductory course for students whose major is not English. Most of the Saudi universities use Arabic as a medium of instruction. Some of these universities use English as a medium of instruction only in academic disciplines such as science, medicine, and engineering.

It is very important to mention that teaching English in Saudi Arabia is affected by many complex factors including the Saudi political, economic, cultural and religious context. Many critical scholars such as Phillipson (1992) and Pennycook (2007) state that the spread

of English has an imperialistic purpose. On the other hand, scholars like Brutt-Griffler (2002) believe that English has become a world language, one that belongs to its worldwide speakers to fulfill their own intellectual and economic purposes, to the extent that it has been stripped of its association with Western culture. The importance of learning the English language is often debated among critical scholars; this debate is reflected in the local context of Saudi Arabia.

English was introduced in Saudi education in 1924, and then with the discovery of oil, English became an important factor in the economic development of Saudi Arabia. In addition, the increasing numbers of foreign workers in the country required Saudis to be fluent in English for communicative purposes (Elyas & Picard, 2010; Faruk, 2013, Mahboob & Elyas' 2014). However, introducing English in Saudi formal education was not welcomed by all Saudis (Elyas & Picard, 2010; Faruk, 2014b, Mahboob & Elyas 2014). It created a significant conflict between Saudi scholars and the religious leaders in Saudi Arabia. Some argued that teaching English as a second language would influence the Saudi religious educational system and Westernize its people. Conversely, other scholars argued that English could be used as a tool for development, as it is the language of science and technology. These scholars argued that English would not affect the Saudi Islamic identity. Instead, it was an important tool to spread Islam and to communicate with millions of Muslim non-Arabic pilgrims who visited the country annually from all over the world (Elyas, 2008). However, the “status of English in the Saudi Arabian curriculum” was considered “as a poor second to Arabic and religious instruction” (Elyas & Picard, 2010, p. 140). Western cultural references were avoided in English textbooks from 1982 to 2012 (Faruk, 2014b). According to Faruk

(2014a, 2014b), most of the studies that were conducted in the 1990s showed that Saudi students generally had low motivation to learn English.

In the 2000s, Saudis had developed more positive attitudes towards English than in the 1990s, a change reflected in the English curriculum and materials. This change in Saudi attitudes and in the Saudi English curriculum was accompanied by changes in Saudi political, social, economic, and educational systems (Faruk, 2014a). In the following section, I discuss these changes that affect English language teaching and Saudi women's roles and education in general. The next section also displays the challenges the new Saudi generations face and other challenges faced by Saudi English education.

New Generation: Changes and Challenges

Changes. According to Yamany (1996), the history of Saudi women since the establishment of Saudi Arabia as a kingdom in 1932 can be made to correspond to three stages. From 1932 to 1950, women accepted traditional roles as wives and mothers. In the second stage, from the 1960s to 1970s, women experienced modern schooling involving university education, either in Saudi Arabia or abroad. The third stage represented the new generation that was “trying to take active roles in redefining their social identity” (p. 270).

There are many factors that have changed the attitudes toward gender roles and English language teaching among the new Saudi generation. The first factor is the expansion of education and the increasing enrollment of women at all levels of education. “In one generation, the kingdom has gone from the highest illiteracy rates (60 %) in the world to one of the highest literacy (96 %) rates” (Doyle, 2013, para. 7). The second factor is the growing number of Saudi students who have scholarships to study in English-speaking countries. Many of these Saudi students who studied abroad return to their country with transformed

views of their roles in the society. Also, many of these students contribute to the development of English language education in Saudi Arabia when they return to their country (Alrabai, 2016). The third factor is the increasing enrollment of women in different fields of employment. “In offices, newspapers, and employment fairs, young Saudi women vie for jobs that would often have been closed to their mothers” (McDowall, 2013, p. 3). The fourth factor is the access to mass media, TV, and internet. “Saudis are some of the largest users of the Internet” (Doyle, 2013, para. 9). The last factor is the Saudi ambition to be a developed country by reducing its dependence on the oil industry and developing “a knowledge-based economy” (Faruk, 2014a, p). This ambition was announced through the royal declaration of the Saudi 2030 vision in 2016 that resulted in major social and economic reforms that took place in 2017 and 2018.

As a result, all these factors have given “the new generation the tools to analyze and question the foundation of their gender role” (Yamani, 2000, p. 143). Yamani argued that the new generation, unlike their mothers and grandmothers, must decide on the role of education in their lives - whether their education will enhance the role of wife/mother, or offer them career opportunities (p. 143). Not only have women changed their way of thinking; Saudi men have also renewed attitudes towards women. Today, most Saudi men want to marry educated women, and many want employed women (“Most Young Saudis,” 2014). The majority of these men support their wives to pursue higher education and to get good jobs.

These factors have impacted the attitudes of the young generation of Saudis toward English teaching and learning. This new generation is more motivated to have competence in and knowledge of the English language. After years of lengthy discussions with conservative scholars who argued that teaching English in early stages of schooling could affect the

students' acquisition of the Arabic language and affect their Saudi and Islamic identity (Elyas & Picard, 2010), it was decided to teach English in primary schools at the fourth grade level, beginning in the academic year 2013 (Alasmi, 2016). In addition, despite the long debate about localizing the content of English textbooks to prioritize Saudi contexts, as seen in textbooks used prior to 2013, the new English textbooks included some Western cultural elements (Faruk, 2014b).

Since coming to power in 2005, King Abdullah has introduced many reforms to improve women's education and participation in society. The first step was heavily investing to improve the higher education sector in terms of quality and quantity. "More than 13 billion dollars is pumped into education, and of this higher education receives more than two billion annually" (Onsman, 2011, 519). For example, Princess Nourah Bint Abdul Rahman University, which was built in 2008, is the largest female-only university in the world (Pavan, 2013). It offers many science courses that were previously only offered to male students (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). Similarly, King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST), which opened in 2009, is the first coeducational institution in Saudi Arabia (Al Alhareth et al., 2015; Pavan, 2013). It is considered one of the most technologically advanced universities in the world (Onsman, 2011). Many of these new, prestigious universities use English as a language of instruction. In addition, Entsab (off-campus education except for exams) has been improved to allow female students to interact directly with instructors by using the internet (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). Online universities and online bookstores all "help to make higher education accessible to home bound women" (Profanter, 2014, P. 213).

Not only has the government aimed to achieve progress in increasing access to higher education (quantity), but it also has tried to increase the quality of education. The government has created and supported research centers in different universities. In addition, curricula of new programs in universities aim to improve students' critical and analytical thinking (Alwehaibi, 2012). Currently, more than 80% of faculty members in Saudi universities have been educated abroad (Pavan, 2013).

Another point worth mentioning is that the Saudi government started to address the diversity of opinions and attitudes among its citizens. Osnman (2011) argued that Saudi higher education started to represent the different Saudis' opinions in regard to issues, such as gender segregation and using English as a medium of instruction. For example, while there are many universities that are segregated by gender, King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST) is a co-educational institution. Even though many universities use Arabic language as the medium of instruction, there are some universities, such as Princess Nourah Bint Abdul Rahman University and KAUST, that use English as a medium of instruction. Osnman (2011) stated: "Nation building is a complex and contentious business, and it is no easier in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, Arabia is taking great strides towards national satisfaction with, and international competitiveness in, its Higher Education sector" (p.530).

Another big investment in Saudi higher education is the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) that has been sending Saudi students to study abroad since 2005. It is "considered as the largest government scholarship program in the world" (Pavan, 2013, p. 26). Without any restriction, almost "any Saudi of school age has been able to receive a full scholarship and healthy monthly stipend for study abroad" (ICEF Monitor, 2016a). To enable

Saudi students to travel to the U.S., an educational agreement between the former U.S. president George W. Bush and Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz was brokered (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). More than 145,000 young Saudis have been able to travel abroad to pursue higher education, and the majority of these students, over 100,000, were currently studying in the U.S. in 2014 (Hausheer, 2014). “Since 2010, Saudi Arabia has been the top sending market for English study in the U.S.” (ICEF Monitor, 2016a); it was the fourth-largest sending market for the U.S. in 2014/15, after China, India, and South Korea (ICEF Monitor, 2015). Although a female student must be accompanied by a male relative, usually her father, brother or husband, in order to be granted a scholarship, “Saudi women make up 43 percent of all Saudi students in the United States” (Hausheer, 2014, p. 6). The vision of this scholarship program is to “prepare distinguished generations for a knowledge society built upon a knowledge-based economy” (Pavan, 2013, p. 26). As a result of encouraging women’s access to higher education in Saudi Arabia or abroad,

[t]he Ministry states that 17 % of all Saudi researchers are female. This figure seems to be higher than that in Germany (12%), Japan (12%) and Korea (11%), and the same as in Luxembourg, according to a recent UNESCO report entitled “women in science: under-represented and under-measured”. Also, Saudi women outnumber western women in worldwide university enrollments and graduation rates, according to 2009 Global Education Digest of UNESCO. (Profanter, 2014, p.211)

In addition to this shift in Saudi education, there is a policy shift in the Saudi government toward women’s issues. In 2005, King Abdullah appointed 30 women to *Majlis Al Shura* (an appointed consultative council in Saudi Arabia); women now represent 20% of

the previously all-male body (McDowall, 2013, p. 2). In 2011, the King gave women the right to vote and run in municipal elections starting in 2015. In addition, because gender segregation is still part of the Saudi national identity, today Saudi Arabia seeks to create a supportive environment that provides gender-segregated work areas in factories, companies, and all other working fields in the country. Saudi women are now seen working in malls, shops, restaurants, and hotels in certain areas, such as reservations and marketing (Al Munajjed, 2010). Also, the government has tried to provide jobs that would allow women to work from home. Moreover, the government allowed female lawyers to “represent clients and offer legal advice” (Sullivan, 2012, p. 3). Also, "Saudi Arabia sent its first ever female Olympic athletes, a runner and a judo fighter, to compete in London" (Fisher, 2013, para. 6).

Unlike previous kings of Saudi Arabia whose policy depended on slow and gradual change, in 2017 the country witnessed a series of historical and major social and economic reforms in a short time frame. These changes were part of the Saudi 2030 vision, which is a major plan led by the 32-year-old crown prince Mohammad bin Salman to reduce Saudi Arabia’s dependence on oil and to revitalize its economy, especially after the collapse of world oil prices in 2015. The crown prince Mohammad bin Salman stated: “We are returning to what we were before — a country of moderate Islam that is open to all religions and to the world” (Rasooldeen & Hassan, 2017, para.2). He added that this young Saudi generation - seventy percent of the country’s citizens are younger than 30 (Rasooldeen & Hassan, 2017) - is not ready to spend another 30 years dealing with extremist thoughts. This young prince blamed the Islamic Awakening (Sahwa) movement that was started in Iran in 1979 for shaping extremist thoughts in Saudi Arabia in the 1980s (Rasooldeen & Hassan, 2017). The new reforms that have challenged “long-established social norms” (Rasooldeen & Hassan,

2017, para.7) include: offering physical education in Saudi female public schools where it had only been offered previously in boys' schools (AL-Sulami & Radwan, 2017), lifting the ban on female driving, allowing women to drive cars and even motorcycles, allowing females to attend football matches in local stadiums (these stadiums are prepared to have a section for men and another section for women), reopening movie theaters that have been closed since the Islamic Awakening in the 1980s ("Year in Review," 2017), issuing tourist visas in 2018 for the first time, and announcing "plans for a \$500 billion Neom project envisioned as a hub for technological innovation" to attract foreign investment and international visitors ("Year in Review," 2017, Tourist Visas section, para. 2).

The list of reforms also includes increasing women's participation in the workforce by offering childcare and transportation support programs for Saudi working women in the private sector ("Over 8,000 Saudi," 2017). In addition, *Saudization*, which means reducing foreign labor, is more strictly applied to create more job opportunities for Saudi women. This was notable considering that a third of the Saudi population are foreign workers, and about 90% of private-sector workers are foreigners (Sullivan, 2012, p. 4). Moreover, the government removed "the need for Saudi women to have a male guardian's approval" in order to be employed (Beiter, 2016, para. 8). Previously Saudi women had to have their father's, brother's, husband's, or a male relative's approval to work. Another reform is the appointment of Saudi women to important positions: Reema bint Bandar as president of the Saudi Federation for Community Sports ("Reema First Woman," 2017), and Tamader bin Youssef appointed as a Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Development ("First Saudi Woman," 2018).

Challenges. Despite all the above-mentioned changes that have been introduced to promote women's education and positions in Saudi Arabia, Saudi women still have many unique challenges to overcome. The first challenge that Saudi women currently face is the reshaping of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), the scholarship program that permits Saudis to study abroad. Due to the collapse of world oil prices in 2015 which caused the current financial crisis in Saudi Arabia, the government is trying to reduce its spending and find ways to reform its finances. One of these reforms is tightening the KASP funding by introducing many tighter requirements for students who want to apply for this scholarship, or those who are already studying abroad (ICEF Monitor, 2016b). These new restrictive rules include: (a) limiting applications for funding unless students have been accepted to one of the world's top 50 academic programs in their field, or one of the world's top 100 universities (ICEF Monitor, 2016b); and (b) linking KASP to employment. "Your Job First and Then Your Scholarship" is the slogan of the new KASP that "makes a direct linkage between jobs and scholarships given to students to study majors needed by the country." Previously, Saudi graduates who benefitted from KASP had to find jobs by themselves. Now, the new KASP "provides jobs first. Based on the offered jobs, the study seats, disciplines, and academic levels are determined for overseas scholarships. These jobs are then announced and candidates are invited to apply" for this new KASP (Saudi Ministry of Education, 2016, para. 2). However, many argue that Saudi students will continue to attend American institutions:

The Education USA webinar presenters stressed that Saudi Arabia could still be a strong market for English programmes even with the scholarship cuts.

Study abroad has now become such a widespread phenomenon within Saudi

Arabia, and the expectation is that many will choose to self-fund at least portions of their overseas education if scholarship funding is no longer available. (ICEF Monitor, 2016a, para. 17)

Another challenge that Saudi women face is the transition from school to work. Although female education in Saudi Arabia has undergone massive changes to increase women's access to higher education, the country is still struggling to employ its most educated women. "With a reported unemployment rate for women of 21.7% and of men 7.6%, there is a large discrepancy in gender differentiated unemployment" (Profanter, 2014). Hopefully, the Saudi 2030 Vision will be able to reduce this unemployment rate. Although the majority of female students are graduating in the fields of education and social service, they have little chance to be decision makers in higher education. For example, in most colleges of Saudi universities the Dean is usually male and "the female is always an associate who answers to the dean" (Profanter, 2014, p. 216).

The final and, in my opinion, one of the most important but dialectic challenges, is keeping the balance between maintaining traditions and dealing with the demands for change in a globalized world. Keep in mind the political, social, religious and cultural context of Saudi Arabia that I have discussed throughout this literature review, as well as the rapid changes that have taken place in the last few years, and it will become apparent that the new Saudi generation is struggling with tension between modernity and traditions. The country is seeking modernity and trying to be a developed country, and at the same time, it is trying to keep its religious and cultural identity (Osnman, 2011; Pavan, 2013, Profanter, 2014).

Maintaining the Saudi distinctive and unique cultural and religious heritage while looking forward to developments in all the country's sectors creates serious opposition

among Saudis. Many have argued that, despite the recent rapid changes that have affected Saudi lives, culture and traditions cannot be changed in a short time (Ben Hubbard & Alsultan, 2017). Others have reasoned that, while many Saudis are hungry for change, there are those who are more cautious and believe that development and progress do not mean assimilating to the West. This is the challenge of those of this new generation who want to create their own future while also remaining true to who they are.

Challenges facing English teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. Despite all the efforts of the Saudi government to improve English education in Saudi Arabia, the low achievement in English among Saudi students in schools and universities has been documented and heavily criticized by local and international studies (Ababneh, 2016; Ahmad, 2015; Alrabai, 2016; Al-Nasser, 2015; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Al-Seghayer, 2015a; Balla, 2017; Ha & Barnawi, 2015). Many complex and inter-related factors have contributed to this low English language competence (Alrabai, 2016). These factors include introducing English to Saudi students in middle school when students are 13 years old, and just recently, it was decided to begin teaching English in the fourth grade. Another factor is the lack of exposure to the English language in students' social life and daily activities because of the dominance of the Arabic language. Also, the use of the Arabic language as a medium of instruction even in English classrooms influences students' English competence (Alrabai, 2016). In addition, the teacher-centered approach that is still implemented in English classrooms deprives students of the opportunity to develop their creative and communicative skills. Students depend on memorizing grammatical rules and vocabulary to pass exams. Further, teachers are not professionally trained to teach English as a foreign language. Many teachers are teaching without certification in foreign language teaching (Al-Seghayer, 2014).

Because English teaching in Saudi Arabia is controlled by the Ministry of Education, teachers have less autonomy. “Teachers are given an identical syllabus, with guidelines and deadlines that they are required to apply and follow” (Al-Seghayer, 2014, p. 23). As a result, the English curriculum is poorly designed and does not address the students’ real needs and abilities. The large number of students and the lack of technology and teaching aids in English classes all affect learning and teaching English (for more details on the factors underlying the low achievement in English language courses in Saudi Arabia, see Ababneh, 2016; Ahmad, 2015; Alhamdan, Honan & Hamid, 2017; Alrabai, 2016; Al-Nasser, 2015; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Al-Seghayer, 2015a; Balla, 2017; Ha & Barnawi, 2015).

Unlike Saudi public schools, many “Saudi universities have enough qualified and skilled English teachers, advanced curricula and technology- assisted instructional methodologies”, but because of the factors that I have discussed above, the extent of Saudi high school graduates’ English language acquisition is below the level expected in Saudi universities. “Consequently, their pace of learning English at tertiary level is abysmally disappointing” (Ahmad, 2015, p. 191). These Saudi school graduates will be faced with a substantial deficit of English language proficiency between school and university. Yet, these students must successfully complete English introductory courses within one academic year to be enrolled in their college programs. Some of these programs are taught entirely in English (Ahmad, 2015, p. 191). Despite all efforts, many students majoring in English graduate with deficient English skills. In addition, most Saudi students who were granted scholarships to pursue graduate studies in their own country or abroad reported difficulties in passing English proficiency tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL (Ha & Barnawi, 2015).

Research on Saudi Female Students in Graduate Programs at Saudi Universities

When reviewing the literature that is related to the educational experiences of Saudi female graduate students in Saudi public universities, I found only three published studies in Arabic (the literature search for this study ended in December 2018). I searched in many English and Arabic data bases. However, most of the English studies I found focused on the educational experiences of Saudi female medical students, pharmacists, and nursing students. However, the research on the experiences of these graduate females in Saudi medical schools is not related to this study, which focuses on Saudi females who graduated with a master's degree in an English language related field. Actually, unlike other graduate programs in Saudi public universities, medical schools in Saudi Arabia are gender-mixed. As a result, the educational experiences of female students in the medical schools are different from the experiences of Saudi female students in other programs in Saudi public universities.

The three studies I found in Arabic only focused on the difficulties that Saudi females faced in graduate programs in the College of Education at different Saudi universities (Abo Alola, 2015; Alkhwaiter, 2017; Alzoman& Alarifi, 2016). These studies were conducted by female researchers and utilized quantitative methods. Abo Alola's (2015) study examined the academic problems that 99 Saudi master's degree female students faced in the College of Education at Taif University. By using questionnaires as a method of data collection, the researcher reported some challenges that Saudi females faced. These challenges included: implementing traditional rote learning, shortage in female academic advisors, lack of effective communication with male instructors and advisors, and lack of up-to-date references in the library.

Alkhowaiter's (2017) is another quantitative study that explored the challenges that Saudi graduate females faced in the College of Education at King Abdulaziz University in Al-Qqasim. Alkhowaiter (2017) received 126 completed surveys that she used for data analysis. She found that some of the challenges that Saudi females faced were having no right to choose the academic advisor and having ineffective communication between students and faculty members. Also, the study participants reported that there was a lack of institutional services and resources, such as: the lack of up-to-date references, having no access to internet and high-tech equipment on the campus, and lack of daycare services on the campus that can support student parents.

The last published study I found is Alzoman and Alarifi's (2016). This quantitative study identified the academic problems that 148 Saudi female graduate students faced in the College of Education at King Saud University in Riyadh. The researchers used surveys as a method of data collection. The findings of this study included problems related to faculty members, such as not being qualified to teach graduate students and not being supportive. Also, some faculty members implemented traditional, outdated teaching methods based on lecturing, and they did not provide students with constructive feedback. In addition, the study reported that there was a lack of library services, including lack of up-to-date resources and lack of printing services. Lastly, the researchers discussed that some administrators did not play their role effectively to meet the students' needs.

Part 2: American Education

American Women's Schooling: Historical Overview

American women's experiences in the United States are diverse. Gender, race, and socioeconomic class have an important role in shaping American women's educational

experiences. A brief historical overview of women's schooling in the United States from the 18th century to the 21st century shows how education has changed the lives, identities, and societal roles of American women. Similar to Saudi women, American women's access to higher education was not taken for granted two centuries ago. American women had to overcome many obstacles in order to achieve equal access to education (Dentith, 2016; Madigan, 2009; May, 2006). These women enrolled in different academic institutions, which have changed over time. Each generation has had its own view of education, identity, and social expectations.

Female education in colonial America in the 1700s was based on European education. The main goal of women's education at that time was to prepare girls for their role as a good wife, mother and housekeeper. Girls were taught basic reading skills in order to study the Bible (National Women's History Museum [NWHM], 2007; Solomon, 1985). After the Revolutionary War later in the 1700s, female education had a different purpose. Education was a tool for change. The transition from colonial to republican America introduced many expectations for American citizens, including women, and led to the concept of Republican motherhood (NWHM, 2007; Solomon, 1985). A woman's identity continued to focus on domestic skills. Republican mothers were seen as committed to their families and were those who acted in the interest of raising patriotic sons (NWHM, 2007; Solomon, 1985). In the late 1700s, America experienced a transition in economy from producing handmade items to industrialized products, which allowed middle-class girls to have more time to pursue a basic education (NWHM, 2007).

The 1800s witnessed a remarkable change in the American educational system, especially for women. This change was a result of many social, political, economic, and

religious factors that shaped U.S. life. The expansion of women's education in this century led to the initiation of women's higher education (NWHM, 2007; Solomon, 1985). The beginning of the 19th century was characterized by movements such as the Female Seminary Movement and the Sunday School Movement, that resulted in the expansion of female primary and secondary schools. The expansion of schools created a shortage of 30,000 teachers for these schools. Although many were skeptical about hiring female teachers because they did not want to see women work outside the home, it seemed like a reasonable solution to the shortage. Economically it worked well because "female teachers were paid as little as 1/3 of what male teachers made" (NWHM, 2007, p. 5). Then, the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention was considered the impetus of the women's rights movement; women called for coeducation in both primary and secondary public schools. By the mid-19th century, most Americans accepted coeducational public schools (Gordon, 1990). Although coeducation in primary and secondary schools was a controversial issue, it became the norm because it was cheaper (NWHM, 2007).

Also, by the mid-1800s, female colleges began to spread throughout the United States. Some of these colleges were female seminaries, and then they turned into female colleges like Mount Holyoke. Although some of these colleges aimed to offer women an equal education similar to that of males, many colleges were conservative and offered women different curricula (NWHM, 2007). Oberlin College in Ohio was the first college to admit female students in 1837 (Graham, 1978; May, 2006). However, it did not offer women the same courses offered to men. For example, "Ladies Course" was offered to women to focus on motherhood (NWHM, 2007). In 1861, Vassar College was established by Mathew Vassar. This college was the first college in the United States that offered women quality

education equal to that of men. However, this college required high tuitions, so most of its students were from wealthy families (Madigan, 2009, NWHM, 2007).

In the late 19th century, the idea of coeducation in colleges was introduced. However, male colleges and universities did not easily accept opening their doors to women. “A few private men’s colleges admitted women for local, idiosyncratic reasons or when pressured by women’s rights advocates to do so” (Gordon, 1990, p. 21). Also, coeducation was encouraged by the “passage of the 1862 Morrill Act funding university growth” (May, 2006, p. 628). Many colleges started to be coeducational at the end of the 19th century, especially in the Midwest (NWHM, 2007). On the other hand, the Eastern states were slower to accept the idea of coeducation. Most of the prestigious colleges, such as Harvard, Columbia and Brown, refused to admit women, but allowed them to be admitted in coordinate colleges, female colleges that were affiliated with these prestigious colleges. They consisted of Radcliffe at Harvard, Barnard at Columbia, and Pembroke at Brown (Graham, 1978; Madigan, 2009; NWHM, 2007). Women struggled to have access to the prestigious colleges attended by men. For instance, 327 years after opening, Harvard finally opened its doors for women to receive a degree in 1963 (NWHM, 2007; Walsh, 2012).

Even when women had access to coeducational colleges, they still faced many challenges. Many of these colleges offered limited majors for women, and many of them offered classes that were separated from men and closely supervised (Graham, 1978; Madigan, 2009; NWHM, 2007). Thus, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Wellesley, Barnard, Radcliffe, Vassar, and Bryn Mawr continued to provide female students “with single-gender university environments designed to meet their specific educational needs” (Madigan, 2009, p.12). The founders of these Eastern colleges, which later were known as the Seven Sisters,

argued that these colleges met the standards of women's higher education without "scarifying femininity"; female students in these colleges would "develop their minds without becoming like men" (Gordon, 1990, p. 26).

The increasing presence of women in higher education, and the debut of coeducational colleges, created controversy and anxiety in the society. There was a growing fear that educating women would change the division of labor. Many claimed that women were intellectually inferior to men, and some argued that education would affect women's health and their ability to have healthy children (Gordon, 1990; May, 2006).

The 1900s were characterized by rapid change in women's status in the United States. Until 1910, women had to choose between a career or marriage (Gordon, 1990). In the 19th century, many U.S. districts enacted a policy known as the marriage bar that "barred the hiring of married women and authorized the firing of women who got married." By 1941, this policy had been dismissed by several states' Supreme Court decisions (NWHM, 2007, p. 15). In addition, the desegregation law was issued in the 20th century to give African American and other women of color the chance to have an equal education similar to that of White women. Another important law was Title IX of the Education Amendments in 1972. This law was the first law that explicitly prohibited sex discrimination in U.S. education (Madigan, 2009; NWHM, 2007).

Although the 20th century provided women with greater access to higher education, and coeducation was expanded throughout the country, the advances did not ensure equal opportunities in U.S. education. Despite an increase in the percentage of women who received Ph.D. degrees in the 21st century, men still have stronger presence in higher education as faculty members (May, 2006). In addition, while women in higher education are

still “over-represented” in fields such as education, humanities and social science, they are underrepresented in areas of engineering or areas related to hard sciences (Madigan, 2009; May, 2006; Nash & Romero, 2012). “Higher education today continues to be a sex-segregated workplace in which women disproportionately occupy the lowest ranks, at the least prestigious institutions, with the lowest pay and the least job security” (May, 2006, p. 626).

In addition to gender and socioeconomic class, race has an important role in shaping women’s educational experiences in the United States. According to studies in the 1990s, while majority women faced gender discrimination in education, minority women such as African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic and Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, and Arab/Muslim Americans, faced double oppression: gender and racial discrimination (Turner & Thompson, 1993). They had fewer opportunities to access higher education. Once they were admitted to a university, they had higher dropout rates than White majority students (Ponterotto, 1990). In addition, their opportunities to complete doctorates and to have academic careers were greatly reduced. (Turner & Thompson, 1993).

Diversity and Multicultural Education in the United States

One of the most important visible changes that occurred in American higher education in the 21st century was the increasing enrollment of minority students who were “historically excluded from higher education because of their racial or ethnic background, socioeconomic class, or sex” (Zamani, 2003, p.5). According to Zamani (2003), “demographers project that by the year 2050, because an estimated 60 percent of the U.S. population will be people of color, members of so-called racial and ethnic minorities will make up the majority of students in college” (p. 5). Today, diversity on U.S. campuses not

only includes gender, class, race and ethnicity, but also religion, sexual orientation, and disability issues. Consequently, the big challenge that faces U.S. higher education is meeting the needs of all these diverse students, and creating a democratic and pluralistic society (Altbach, Gumport, & Berdah, 2011).

The curriculum implemented in American higher education reflects the social change over the last three centuries. It is often “characterized as pendulum swinging from one extreme to another: from religion to secular science, from prescribed study of classics to curricular pluralism, and from tradition and conservatism to experimentation and growth” (Altbach et al., 2011, p. 409). With the increasing diversity among students in the United States, a curriculum movement occurred in the last few decades known as multicultural education. The field of multicultural education is very complex, influenced by different theoretical perspectives, such as feminism, critical race theory, postmodernism, and postcolonialism (Asher, 2007). Theorists of this field have discussed many different definitions, goals, and approaches of multicultural education (Banks, 1993a). So, there is no complete agreement about the boundaries and the aims of this field.

Although the inequalities that face people of color in educational institutions was the focus of the many different definitions of multicultural education (Banks, 1993a), multicultural education became “an umbrella movement for a variety of forms of difference, particularly race, class, and gender. Within each category of difference, other issues emerged: linguistic, ethnic and cultural, sexual orientation and ability” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 55). According to Banks (1993b) and Sleeter (2005), multicultural education aimed to reform the educational institutions to provide the chance for *all* students, including males, females, White middle-class students and students of color, to have equal educational opportunities.

According to some authors, such as Banks (1993a) and Gorski (2015), the roots of contemporary multicultural education date back to the civil rights movement between the late 1960s and early 1970s when African Americans and other people of color questioned the discrimination that existed in U.S. institutions. Not only ethnic studies, but also women's studies have had a big influence on multicultural education in the United States (Sleeter, 2005). Feminist movements in the 1960s and 1970s challenged gender inequalities in education and employment. "Feminist scholars and other women activists, like groups of color before them, insisted on curricula more inclusive of their histories and experiences" (Gorski, 2015, para. 3). In addition, postcolonial and feminist theories called for recognizing all women from different races, ethnicities and classes. Feminist scholars called for recognizing women as having complex and multiple identities and argued that multicultural education cannot consider gender and race as separate identities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Asher (2005, p.1080) argued that educators have to "consider the intersections of history, geography, language, class, and culture as dynamic, context-specific markers of identity as they create curricular spaces for students."

In the 1980s, multicultural education theorists "refused to allow schools to address their concerns by simply adding token programs and special units on famous women or famous people of color"; instead they called for examining schools as social systems (Gorski, 2015, para. 6). One of the most important scholars of multicultural education, James A. Banks, argued that change should occur in all aspects of schools including curriculum, instructional material, the behaviors and the attitudes of teachers and administrators, and learning styles (Banks, 1993a). By the mid 1980s, there was a new phase of multicultural education that moved beyond school system change to focus on social change. Many

scholars, such as “Carl Grant, Christine Sleeter, Geneva Gay, and Sonia Nieto provided more scholarship in multicultural education, developing new, deeper frameworks that were grounded in the ideal of equal educational opportunity and a connection between school transformation and social change” (Gorski, 2015, para. 7).

The third phase of multicultural education occurred in the final decade of the 20th century. In this phase, scholars criticized multicultural education as not being able to change issues of inequality that face minority students, and not being able to lead to social justice or structural change (Gorski, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995). They argued that “the education system was not only plagued by unequal treatment of traditionally oppressed groups, but was also ill-equipped to prepare even the most highly privileged students to competently participate in an increasingly diverse society” (Gorski, 2015, para. 8). Scholars, such as Joel Spring, Peter McLaren, and Henry Giroux (as cited in Gorski, 2015, para. 9) “contributed to a new body of critical sociocultural criticism of educational institutions within the context of larger societal and global dimensions of power, privilege, and economics, and the intersections of these.” These scholars called for promoting critical, analytical, and creative thinking skills among students (Gorski, 2015). For example, Joseph (2000) and Nieto (2002) argued that students are not passive learners. Instead, learners’ experiences and cultures should be used as a source of learning. Multicultural education should promote individual and social transformations (Joseph, 2000).

Although issues of diversity in higher education were discussed, racial, gender and class discriminations still existed (Menges & Exum, 1983; Zamani, 2003). According to Eldering (1996), multicultural education led to assimilation more than pluralism. Access to and success in higher education in the 21st century are still “correlated with socioeconomic

class” (Altbach et al., 2011, p. 317). Additionally, despite efforts to provide higher education to students from lower socioeconomic classes, tuitions are still high and students need to overcome dependence on student loans. “American society is becoming not only more unequal, but also more predictable in the intergenerational transmission of higher educational attainment” (p. 338). Students from well-educated and rich families are expected to have higher achievement in school and to get access to college more than students from lower socioeconomic classes (Altbach et al., 2011). According to Bowles and Gintis (2011), "the economy produces people" (p.53). As a result of the U.S. capitalist economy, equal schooling does not mean producing equal opportunity in the labor market. U.S. education is simply reproducing this capitalist society (Bowles & Gintis, 2011).

Multicultural education and international students. Another important population that has a significant presence in the U.S is international students who come to the U.S to study in its educational institutions. Some scholars have called these students “voluntary immigrants,” as they have the choice to return to their countries or stay in the United States to have an educational experience (Ritz, 2010). After the Second World War, and with the passage of the Fulbright Act in 1946, U.S. institutions officially opened their doors to international students from all over the world (Caldwell, 2013; Shabeeb, 1996). Because the U.S. higher education system is considered one of the best educational systems globally (Al-Shedokhi, 1986), and because of the increasing need to learn the English language, which is the language of globalization, thousands of international students have traveled to the U.S. to study in its institutions (Caldwell, 2013). Actually, “postsecondary institutions in the U.S. still educate the largest numbers of international students when compared to Australia, Britain, and other European countries” (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003, p. 47). According to The

Institute of International Education's *Open Doors Report* (2015), there has been a 40% increase in enrollment of international students in U.S. higher education institutions in the last decade (as cited by Ragsdell, 2016).

In addition, international students studying in American schools not only benefit themselves and their countries, but also they contribute to the U.S. economy and add cultural enlightenment (Caldwell, 2013; Shabeeb, 1996; Shaw, 2009). "In 2012 alone, foreign students contributed nearly \$23 billion to the US economy in tuition and living expenses" (Caldwell, 2013, pp.2-3).

Although many multicultural education scholars (Banks,1993b; Sleeter, 2005; Nieto, 2002) mentioned in their definitions of multicultural education that this field is designed to reform all educational institutions to help "*all* students" to have equal educational opportunities, the focus is still on minority students, such as African Americans and Latinos. Despite the strong presence of international students on U.S. campuses, these students have not had a big influence on multicultural education compared to other minority students who live in the United States.

There is a huge body of literature on international students in the United States. However, most of the existing literature on international students has focused on aspects such as: culture shock, intercultural competence, international students' security and rights, internationalization (Alhazmi, 2010), the benefits of international students in American institutions (Alhajjuj, 2016), academic challenges and adjustment problems, and coping strategies that are used to adjust to the new life (Alhajjuj, 2016; Shaw 2009). Razeq & Coyner (2013, p. 104) discussed that, although many "scholars have addressed social, economic, and academic issues related to international students," and more recently, some

“researchers began investigating international students’ adjustment patterns, linguistic problems, campus involvement, and academic achievement,” only a limited number of studies have discussed the cultural aspects related to international students. In addition, Ragsdell (2016) stated that many scholars “have focused on the inclusion of multiculturalism in countries outside of the United States; however, none of the research addressed the necessity, benefits, and impact of including multiculturalism in U.S. higher education institutions from the international student’s perspective” (p. 4). According to Ragsdell (2016), scholars have not examined the experiences of international students related to “the impact of including multiculturalism in the institutions’ curriculum, programs, practices, and policies” (p.6).

Moreover, based on all the literature I have read about multicultural education, I have not found any published academic article or book that addresses the influence of international women scholars on multicultural education in U.S. higher education. The only article I have found that addressed female international students in the United States with regard to multicultural education is Cole & Ahmadi’s (2003) study on Muslim international college women. Cole & Ahmadi (2003) argued that “research examining the college experiences of Muslim students, specifically women wearing the hijab (veil), and its probable influence on their academic and social development is scanty” (p.47). According to Cole & Ahmadi (2003), research that has been done on female international students examined their behavioral and psychological experiences in colleges to understand their academic achievement. The studies focused on explaining students’ success or failure by looking at the students’ feeling of alienation, self-confidence, and self-concept. Cole & Ahmadi (2003) discussed that female international students face “double jeopardy of being female and

international” (p. 49). In addition, Muslim women on college campuses face more discrimination for being veiled, especially since so many people “seemed misinformed or had little knowledge about Muslims and the hijab” (p. 46). As U.S. institutions continue to attract international students worldwide, including Saudi female students, these institutions should include them under the umbrella of multicultural education to meet their needs and to provide them with an effective educational experience (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003), because international women’s failure can cause high financial expenditures, as well as negatively affect their self-esteem (Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002).

Saudi Arabia and the United States: Common Economic Interests and Cultural Divide

Saudi Arabia is considered the largest Arabic country in the Middle East, and it has an important role among Gulf and Muslim countries (Onsman, 2011; Profanter, 2014). Also, it has an economic importance as one of the world’s largest producers of oil, especially before the global drop in oil prices. Its religious importance in the Islamic world is significant because it is the birthplace of Islam and the home to the two holy cities of Makkah and Medina where Muslims from all over the world go for pilgrimage (Muyidi, 2015).

In addition, Saudi Arabia has been “a traditional U.S. ally in the region” (Mishra, 2007, p. 261). This “alliance between the U.S. government, a global superpower, and Saudi Arabia, one of the most important Middle East countries, increases both countries’ economic interests,” especially after the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s (Muyidi, 2015, p. 1). Also, this alliance was renewed by President Trump’s visit to Saudi Arabia in 2017, his first foreign trip as president (“Year in Review,” 2017). However, not only the geographical distance, but also differences in religion, language and ideologies have created a huge cultural gap between the two countries (Muyidi, 2015). “Although economic and political

ties between the United States and Saudi Arabia have historically been strong, cultural ties and mutual respect and understanding on a social level have been more difficult” (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015, p.2).

Based on the literature that I have discussed above, the huge difference of ideologies between Saudi Arabia and the U.S. becomes apparent, especially regarding women’s higher education and women’s identities. While the U.S. has separation of church and state, Islam influences all aspects of life in Saudi Arabia, including education. Saudi education is free, based on the Islamic religion, and separated by gender. Conversely, U.S. education is secular, depends on the capitalist economy, and access and success in higher education are still correlated with the socioeconomic class of students (Altbach et al., 2011; Bowles & Gintis, 2011). Genders are mixed in all aspects of public life in the United States. Moreover, the White mainstream population in the U.S. is an individualistic society, whereas Saudi Arabia is more collectivistic (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). In addition, while Saudi Arabia is mostly homogenous (El-Banyan, 1974), diversity and multiculturalism characterize the United States (Altbach et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, looking across both nations, Saudi Arabia and the U.S., it is interesting to see the similarities in educational experiences, where women’s access to higher education was not taken for granted two centuries ago. No matter what the religious beliefs are, women were marginalized to serve men and to assume the role of wife, mother and housekeeper in both nations. In both nations, gender segregation played an important role in education.

However, women’s identities, views and struggles against inferiority in the two countries are different because they were shaped by different historical and sociopolitical climates within the boundaries of the two countries. As a result, there is a vast

misunderstanding between the American view of Saudi women, and the Saudi view of American women. Mishra (2007) analyzed and compared the disparate representations of Saudi women in the American press (*The Washington Post*) with those of American women in the Saudi press (*Arab News*) from 2001 to 2004. Mishra found that

[w]hile *The Washington Post* overwhelmingly portrayed Saudi women as oppressed victims in need of Western liberation, the *Arab News* represented most freedoms enjoyed by American women as shallow. Even as the *Arab News* primarily constructed American women as ethnocentric, superficial, individualistic and immoral, it simultaneously bestowed Saudi women with the responsibility of resisting Westernization and preserving Islamic purity, national dignity and culture. (p. 259)

In addition, Muyidi's (2015) study examined the attitudes of American students in U.S. universities toward the representation of Saudi students in American media. Muyidi found that American students who participated in the study agreed that the U.S. media promotes a negative image of Saudi Arabia as a country of terrorism, and as a country that lacks human rights. The study showed that a large number of American students lack information about Saudi Arabia (Muyidi, 2015). Because most Americans have *no* knowledge about Saudi Arabia and its people - except what they know about Osama bin Laden or the 9/11 attacks - they accept as fact only what they see in Western news, which depicts the negative or exaggerated image of Saudi society, or what they see in Hollywood movies that present Saudis as terrorists, rich men, or humiliated women covered in black (Ahmad, 2014). The extremist stereotypes portray Saudi women in U.S. media as oppressed with no rights, freedom, or dignity.

Saudi Arabian Students in the United States

Saudi students have been studying in U.S. institutions since the 1950s (Caldwell, 2013). The discovery of oil in the 1930s and the economic growth of Saudi Arabia created a need for qualified Saudi citizens to contribute in the development of the country. In 1950, American universities hosted the first wave of Saudi students that consisted of thirteen men. In the 1970s, there was an increasing number of Saudi students enrolled in the United States. In 1980–1981, there were 10,440 Saudi students in American colleges and universities (Alhajj, 2016). After the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, which were committed by nineteen hijackers, fifteen of them from Saudi Arabia, stereotypes about Saudis increased. Saudis who were studying in American institutions received undue discriminatory treatment, and many of them returned to their home country (Mishra, 2007; Muyidi, 2015).

To rebuild trust and a strong economic relationship, the former King Abdullah visited the United States in 2005 and signed many agreements with the former U.S. president George W. Bush. One of these agreements was an educational agreement between the two countries (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). The King Abdullah Scholarship program (KASP) was created to enable thousands of young Saudis to study in the United States. One of the main goals of this scholarship program, in addition to improving the Saudi education system and exposing young Saudis to different cultures, was to “deliver a true picture of Saudis to Americans and to clarify the distorted image provided by the U.S. media by showing the Saudi way of life directly to Americans” (Muyidi, 2015, p. 3). Today, Saudi students who study on U.S. campuses belong to one of three categories: (a) Saudis who have a full scholarship from KASP; (b) Saudis who are employees in Saudi oil companies, or at Saudi

universities, and are sponsored by their employers; or (c) Saudis who are self-sponsored students (Alhajjuj, 2016).

Research on Saudi Female Students at American Universities

There is an extensive body of literature on international students in the United States. However, according to Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern (2015), the existing literature on international students “has focused on international students in general (using a mixed sample from many different countries) or has focused primarily on Asian students” (p. 21). Although there is a significant number of Saudi students studying abroad, there has been very little research on Saudi students (Alhazmi, 2010, Alqefari, 2015; Altamimi, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Shaw, 2009).

According to Shaw (2009), the first study that examined Saudi students was in 1973. Shaw (2009) argued that the lack of early research on Saudi students was due to historical reasons. “Prior to the discovery of oil in the 1930s, Saudi Arabia was characterized by isolationism, and a significant percentage of its population was nomadic Bedouins” (p.49). Shaw (2009) suggested that the absence of published research on Saudi students in general is due to the fact that

[s]ince the expectation is that these Ph.D. students will complete their studies and return home, one can conclude that the authors did not remain in the U.S. to publish articles or continue their research. This, perhaps, explains the absence of U.S.-published research other than dissertations. (Shaw, 2009, p.48)

In addition, the absence of early research on Saudi women is because they did not have the chance to travel to the U.S. in significant numbers until 2005, after the launching of KASP

(Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). Before this scholarship program, there was a small percentage of Saudi female students who were sponsored by Saudi universities, or who were “wives and /or daughters of male students or diplomats who decided to take advantage of their American stay and study” (Al-nusair, 2000, p. 59).

Most of the studies that have been conducted to examine Saudi students (*males and females*) are very old, conducted between the 1970s and 1990s. Few of them are published in journal articles; they are either doctoral dissertations or master’s theses by male researchers. These studies focused more on male students because most of the available populations of these studies were males. Also, most of these studies utilized quantitative research and used the same instrument, the Michigan International Student Problem Inventory (MISPI), that examined variables relating to students’ adjustments, such as students’ age, gender, and marital status. These studies include: Al-Shedokhi (1986); Al-Shehry (1989); Rasheed (1972); Sahabi (1987); Shabeeb (1996). The main focus of these studies was to examine Saudi students’ adjustment problems and educational experiences in the United States. However, some studies examined Saudi students’ perception of topics related to Saudi Arabia, such as students’ perception of the Saudi education system (Mitchell, 2013; Rasheed, 1972; Sahabi, 1987) and students’ perceptions of women’s roles in Saudi Arabia (Alshaya, 2005). Due to the limits of this dissertation, I will discuss only the recent studies that have examined the experiences of Saudi male and female students in the United States.

On the other hand, the experiences of Saudi *females* studying abroad are still largely unexplored (Altamimi, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). After reviewing the relevant literature, I found only three published articles on this topic (Alqefari, 2015; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Sandekian et al., 2015). Other studies that

focused on Saudi women's experiences in the United States include three master's theses (Albalawi, 2013; Al-Sheikhly, 2012, Kampman, 2011), and five doctoral dissertations (Arafeh, 2017; Alhajjaj, 2016; Heiberger, 2017; Macias, 2016; Moursi, 2018). Unlike the old quantitative studies that examined the experiences of Saudi male students, most of these studies are qualitative, recent, and carried out by female researchers. In addition, I have cited two studies, Alhazmi (2010) and Altamimi (2014), that were conducted in Australia and Canada. Although these studies were not conducted in the United States, their inclusion is relevant, as they are among very few recent qualitative studies that examine Saudi students' experiences abroad.

Challenges that Saudi Female Students Face in the United States

Studying in coeducational classes. One of the challenges that Saudi female students face is being in coeducational classes (Alhazmi, 2010; Alqefari, 2015; Altamimi, 2014; Kampman, 2011; Macias, 2016; Moursi, 2018; Sandekian et al., 2015). In his qualitative pilot study, Alhazmi discussed that the Saudi culture of gender-segregation affected both Saudi male and female students in Australia. For these students, a mixed classroom was a great source of anxiety. The students' unease was evident upon their arrival, particularly in the first three months attending a mixed gender class. In addition, Kampman's (2011) thesis examined the educational experiences of five Saudi female students enrolled in a summer program at Portland State University (PSU). Kampman (2011) found that her Saudi female participants had specific concerns and nervousness regarding dealing with and presenting in front of male classmates. For these women, it was their first time being in a classroom with men. For example, Kampman stated that although one of her participants had presented a debate to over 100 women in Dubai, it was challenging for this student to deliver a

presentation in front of men in one of her classes. However, Kampman argued that, although American teaching practices posed difficulties for the participants, being in coeducational classrooms was not very challenging because they had traveled abroad and interacted with men before they came to the United States.

Unlike Kampman's participants who were from more modernized Saudi Arabian cities and had travelled abroad many times, Alqefari's (2015) study targeted those female students who had not travelled outside Saudi Arabia prior to their educational experience abroad, and those who were from very conservative regions in Saudi Arabia. This qualitative study was conducted in Saudi Arabia. At the time of the study, all the participants had returned to Saudi Arabia after receiving a postgraduate degree abroad. Alqefari did not mention specifically where his female participants had studied. Because the researcher was a Saudi male, he was not able to contact and interview the female participants directly, which limited the scope of this study. With the help of the female secretary of the women's college in Saudi Arabia, the researcher conducted the interviews with participants by telephone. Alqefari found that coeducational classes are the greatest challenge for Saudi female students studying abroad. Being in mixed classes caused anxiety, which stifled the participants' English proficiency. Also, the participants felt more anxiety in mixed classes with Arab males than in classes with non-Arab male classmates. However, according to Alqefari, the presence of a male relative in the class made the participants feel less anxious and more comfortable. Alqefari found that the longer the Saudi females stayed abroad, the less significant the issue of being in mixed classes became, and the more adaptable they became to the new environment.

In addition, in her mixed methods study (thesis) in a Canadian pre-academic English program, Altamimi (2014) found that Saudi female students remained silent and felt uncomfortable; they had issues with self-confidence and shyness in the English language classrooms. According to Altamimi, although other English language learners can have similar feelings and issues, these issues were particularly significant for Saudi female students because of many reasons. Saudi females were not accustomed to co-ed classes so they limited their socialization to other Saudi women; they were expected by their society to be submissive to males, which caused them to be silent in co-ed classes; Saudi women did not have the chance to practice their English language because all their official and business interactions were conducted by a male relative. In addition to these determinants, Altamimi argued that the curriculum that was implemented and the contents of activities in the English classrooms were not relevant to the Saudi students' culture and were often contradictory to their customs. In contrast, in her qualitative research that included three Saudi female students, Albalawi (2013) argued that a mixed gender classroom, which is usually an issue, did not present any difficulty for her three participants. However, the husband of one participant did not accept the idea of his wife studying in coeducational classes.

The English language and the transition to the U.S. education system. The second challenge that Saudi females encounter is the language adjustment to English, and the transition from Saudi education that promotes a teacher centered national curriculum to the liberal American education system that promotes more student centered approaches (Albalawi, 2013; Al-Sheikhly, 2012; Heiberger, 2017; Kampman, 2011; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Macias, 2016; Moursi, 2018; Razek & Coyner, 2013). In 2012, Al-Sheikhly examined the educational experiences and academic challenges that seven Saudi

female students encountered at Oregon State University. The researcher reported that the English language and the transition to the U.S. education system were challenging for the participants in her study. Also, Kampman (2011) discussed that the transition from the Saudi education system that depended on passive learning to the U.S. education system that emphasized active learning was a cultural and academic challenge for these women. Similarly, Albalawi's (2013) thesis showed that attaining greater proficiency in the English language and passing IELTS or TOEFL tests to gain admission to U.S. universities were major difficulties that faced her participants. Also, her participants reported a difficulty in their transition from the Saudi education system that depended on memorization and passing exams to U.S. education. In addition, Razek & Coyner (2013) reported that some Saudi students were not academically prepared to study in the United States. Specifically, their English language proficiency was questioned by their professors.

Discrimination and stereotyping. Another challenge that Saudi students face is discrimination on and off campus (Alhajjuj, 2016; Caldwell, 2013; Heiberger, 2017; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Moursi, 2018; Razek & Coyner, 2013). Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern (2015) focused on the cultural adjustment of 25 Saudi female students in U.S. colleges and universities. The researchers found that, although most of the participants had positive educational experiences in the United States, some participants endured discrimination. The participants reported that many Americans are 'culturally ignorant' and believe that Saudi women are oppressed and have no rights. According to the researchers, "Saudi women, however, have a cultural understanding that dress regulations and gender segregation in public are about purity and protection for women, rather than oppression" (p.

20). Additionally, the researchers mentioned that their participants enjoyed their roles as ambassadors of their country. Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern stated:

As representatives of Saudi Arabia, they wanted to dispel the myths that they were oppressed, forced to cover themselves, and unequal to men. Most also wanted to share the true tenets of Islam, which are peaceful and honor relationships, as some Americans still equate the religion with extremist views and terrorist acts. (p.21)

Similarly, Alsabatin (2015), Heiberger (2017), Moursi (2018), and Razek and Coyner (2013) discussed that many Saudi students considered themselves representatives of their country and reported that they were conscious about how they were being perceived by Americans.

The absence of the extended family. Albalawi (2013), Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) and Macias (2016) discussed that one of the challenges some Saudi female students faced was the absence of their extended families, even though some participants had at least one family member with them in the United States. Missing the support of the extended family was a challenge for many Saudi students because they came from a collective culture. Razek & Coyner's (2013) qualitative study, that explored the cultural aspects that affected five male and three female Saudi students' adjustments at a Mid-Western research university in the United States, established that Saudi students came from a collectivist culture in which the students thought of themselves as a group rather than individuals. Because of their collectivist culture, several students devoted their time and efforts to helping other Saudi students, which created extra pressure for them because of the added responsibilities they had taken on.

Making and maintaining friendships with American people. In 2013, Caldwell explored the experiences and the adjustment problems that Saudi students encountered on ten campuses in the California State University (CSU) system. In this mixed methods doctoral study, Caldwell (2013) found that Saudi students suffered from the difficulty of making and maintaining friendships with American people. Similarly, Altamimi (2014) found that her Saudi female participants limited their socialization to other Saudi women only. Razek and Coyner (2013) stated: “Saudi students’ participation in the American social life is very limited due to different reasons. Among these reasons, religion, alienation, gender, and dietary restrictions are the most prominent” (p. 112).

Balancing motherhood with academic studies. Alhajjuj’s (2016) dissertation explored the experiences of 14 Saudi mothers who were managing motherhood roles along with academic roles. All the participants were Saudi female doctoral students enrolled in U.S. educational institutions. Although the participants were able to manage their motherhood roles and academic roles successfully, the participants still faced some challenges. Foremost was the lack of support from the Saudi Cultural Mission, whose regulations were ineffectual and funding was not adequate for student parents. Most of the participants reported that one or more family members, such as the husband or children, had experienced cultural or religious adjustment problems. For example, some participants discussed their children’s loss of cultural identity or their difficulty speaking the Arabic language. Feeling guilty for not being able to spend quality time with children was another obstacle the Saudi participants had to deal with. Similarly, Macias (2016) reported that her Saudi participants had the same challenge of balancing motherhood and academic success.

Strategies for Success

Shaw's (2009) dissertation is another qualitative research study that examined Saudi students' experiences. However, this case study focused on the success strategies that were used by 25 Saudi students (18 males and 7 females) at Oregon State University. Shaw reported that the participants described some differences in the educational environment between their home country and the United States. The differences included coeducational classrooms, the use of active learning pedagogies, the intensive presence of technology and other resources on campus, Oregon's climate and the beauty of nature. Shaw noted the resilience of the Saudi students and their ability to develop intercultural competence. In addition, Al-Sheikhly (2012) argued that her Saudi female participants also developed intercultural competence and had strong levels of motivation to succeed. Also, Alhajjuj (2016) found that her Saudi female students were able to develop many strategies that helped them balance motherhood and doctoral studies, such as: time management, setting priorities, limiting social activities to online or weekends, delaying having babies, and seeking support from different sources.

Transformation

Macias (2016) examined the experiences of eleven Saudi women studying in a U.S. university in Texas. Macias used a qualitative phenomenological approach. One of the themes that emerged from this study was transformation. The participants reported that they had changed during their educational experiences in the United States. Many participants commented that they had more self-confidence, motivation, and they planned to be change agents in their local communities. Also, Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern (2015) discussed that Saudi female participants reported that their educational experiences in U.S.

institutions helped them to enjoy diversity, grow intellectually, be more independent, and have more self-confidence and freedom. Most of the Saudi women who adjusted successfully in this study came from modernized regions in Saudi Arabia and were able to communicate well with others in English.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature relevant to this study that examines the educational experiences of Saudi female students who graduated with a master's degree from American and Saudi universities. The first part of this literature review defined the historical, political, social, and educational context of Saudi Arabia. In addition, it provided a brief overview of English education in Saudi Arabia, and a discussion of the studies that examined Saudi females' experiences in graduate programs at Saudi universities. The second part of this literature review discussed American female education in the United States. Also, it discussed how multicultural education has been changing to meet the needs of the American diverse society. In addition, the literature review in this part narrowed to discuss the studies on Saudi female students' experiences at American universities. By presenting these two parts, my aim was to give the reader a clear picture of the two international contexts in which Saudi females have found themselves during their educational experiences in both countries.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

This study is a *qualitative multi-case* study of ten Saudi females who graduated with a master's degree in an English language related field from Saudi and U.S. universities. This study employed qualitative approaches because the key assumptions and features of qualitative research fit well with this study. Unlike quantitative approaches that try to test hypotheses and establish cause-and-effect relationships between variables, qualitative approaches are interested in “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p.5). To be able to gain an understanding of how people in a particular setting and time make sense of their own experiences, qualitative researchers are the key instrument of data collection. Qualitative researchers seek to generate *a rich description* of the social phenomenon they are studying through intense contact with the research participants in their natural settings (Bloomberg & Voepel, 2016; Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). One of the strengths of qualitative research is its ability to reveal the *complexity* of people's lived experiences (Miles et al., 2014). Qualitative research provides insights into what influences people's values and beliefs, and how different contexts influence people's behaviors and actions (Bloomberg & Voepel, 2016; Creswell, 2013). In addition, qualitative research gives voice to the unrepresented populations whose voices are silenced (Creswell, 2013).

Rationale for Case Study Research Methodology

Within the qualitative research framework, this study implemented a multi-case study design (a qualitative two-case study). Creswell (2013) stated: “Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (p. 97). A multi-case study indicates that data collection and analysis come from several cases (Merriam, 2009). The case can be a single individual, group of individuals, a community, a program, a policy, or an institution. The main feature of case study research is that it examines extensively a phenomenon within clear boundaries or limits. Merriam (2009, p. 40) discussed “the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case.” In addition, Miles et al. (2014) argued that the boundary of a case can be defined by the setting, concepts, sampling of the study, etc. According to Merriam (2009), case study research is described as being “particularistic, descriptive and heuristic” (p. 43). It enables the investigator to describe the complexity of a particular social or educational phenomenon in a great depth by providing thick and rich description of that phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Lapan et al., 2012). The purpose of case study research can be either intrinsic or instrumental. While the intent of intrinsic case study design is to help the researcher illustrate and examine a case, the instrumental case study helps the investigator understand a specific issue, problem or concern (Creswell, 2013; Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009).

For all the strengths and the features of case study research discussed above, I chose to conduct a qualitative multi-case study as an appropriate design for my research. According to Merriam (2009), “case study is a particularly appealing design for applied fields of study

such as education” (p. 51). This multi-case study is *intrinsic*. It seeks to understand the educational experiences of Saudi females who completed graduate study in two different contexts, Saudi Arabia and the United States. Multi-case study design is a powerful tool that allowed me to understand how the participants interpret their own experiences, and how their interpretations impacted their education. It helped me to discover the role of culture, religion, social context and educational environment in these experiences.

The Cases and the Boundaries of Each Case

This study has two cases. Each case was defined by a small number of individuals who shared the same culture, language, gender, religious faith, educational level, academic discipline, and geographical location. The first case was limited to the experiences and the perceptions of five Saudi females who spent no more than five years achieving a master’s degree in academic fields related to the English language (including English literature, linguistics, applied linguistics, translation, teaching English to speakers of other languages ‘TESOL’, English for Speakers of Other Languages ‘ESOL’) from American universities, and who range between twenty-five to thirty-five years old. The second case was limited to the experiences and the perceptions of five Saudi females who spent no more than five years achieving a master’s degree in academic fields related to the English language (including English literature, linguistics, applied linguistics, translation, TESOL, ESOL) from Saudi universities, and who range between twenty-five to thirty-five years old. In addition, I considered each individual participant’s experience within each major case as a subcase or an embedded case to present the differences and the unique perspectives of the study participants (see Figure 3.1).

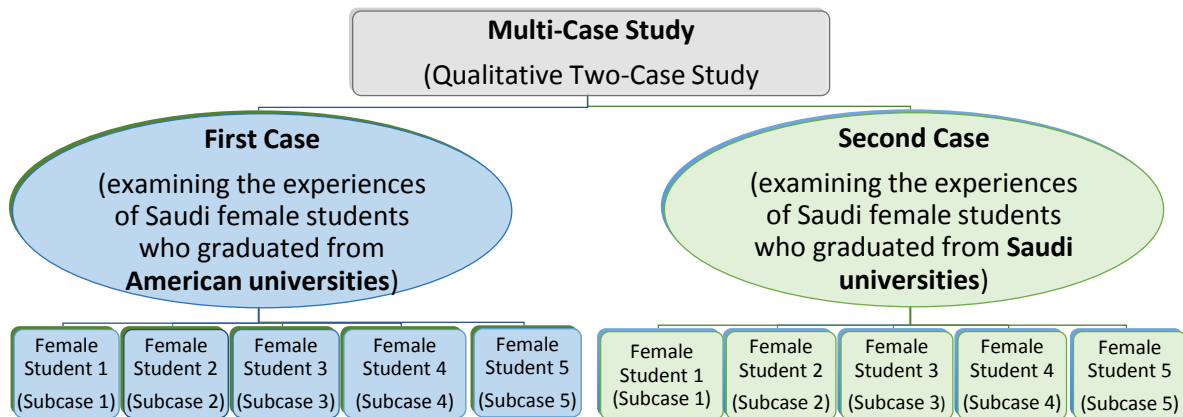


Figure 3.1. The two cases of the study.

Research Site and Participants

This study was conducted in Summer 2018 (from May to August, 2018) in Saudi Arabia. Because this research study did not call for a specific research site in Saudi Arabia, the research site depended on the locations of the individuals who were accessible, willing to participate, and who fulfilled the criteria for this study. Purposeful sampling was used in this study to identify participants. Unlike quantitative researchers who use random sampling because they are concerned with generalizability, qualitative researchers tend to use purposeful sampling, which helps them select individuals who can inform their studies (Bloomberg & Vope, 2016; Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009).

The logic and the power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the purposeful sampling. (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 77)

Also, according to Lapan et al. (2012) and Bloomberg & Voepel (2016), purposeful sampling is often used by case study researchers to get rich information and to indicate clear boundaries of the case.

There are many types of purposeful sampling. For this study, I used a combination of two types of purposeful sampling: homogeneous and snowball sampling. I used homogeneous sampling to select individuals who share similar demographic and social characteristics, and who share the required criteria for each case (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). With snowball sampling, I asked my Saudi female friends who have academic positions at Saudi universities to refer other individuals whom they thought were qualified for this study. One of my Saudi friends - a lecturer in a Saudi university and a participant in this study - nominated three participants who met the criteria of this study. In addition, another Saudi friend added my phone number to a WhatsApp group that included a large number of Saudi female graduates who had completed or were still working on their degrees abroad. She explained to them that I needed participants for my study. As a result, I started to receive many text messages from different Saudi female graduates telling me that they wanted to participate in my study. Thus, I chose ten Saudi female participants who qualified for this study based on the following criteria:

- First Case: Four to five Saudi females who graduated with a master's degree in a field related to the English language (including English literature, linguistics, applied linguistics, translation, TESOL, ESOL) from American universities within two to five years, and whose ages ranged between twenty-five and thirty-five.
- Second Case: Four to five Saudi females who graduated with a master's degree in a field related to the English language (including English literature, linguistics, applied

linguistics, translation, TESOL, ESOL) from Saudi universities within two to five years, and whose ages ranged between twenty-five and thirty-five.

I decided to select individuals who graduated and were not still working on their degrees. I wanted to be sure that they were good informants who were not new to graduate school, who were deeply involved in their academic discipline, and who had the full experience of being graduate students in each case. In addition, I chose this age range of the participants (twenty-five to thirty-five) because in this specific generation, many Saudi women have been exposed to similar Saudi political, economic and educational contexts. In this generation, Saudi women started to study abroad in large numbers and get graduate degrees. This generation is the new generation that I described in the literature review, the one that started “to take active roles in redefining their social identity” (Yamany, 1996, p. 270). Furthermore, the research sample of this multi-case study included ten participants, five participants for each case. This sample size allowed me to describe in depth their experiences and perspectives (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell, 2013) and provided “ample opportunity to identify themes of cases, as well as conduct cross-case theme analysis” (Creswell, 2013, p.157).

Prior Experience Relevant to This Study (Pilot Study)

In Fall 2016, I conducted a class research project (pilot study without an IRB) that is part of a doctoral course (Advanced Qualitative Research Methods-LLSS 605), in order to try out and clarify the research process and methods that I planned to use in this research. The class research project examined the experiences of Saudi female students in higher education in one U.S university. Through a single case study with seven embedded subcases, I collected data from seven participants who had different educational levels, including

graduate, undergraduate and ESL students in an intensive English program, in different academic disciplines at the same university. The class research project enabled me to gain some insights while testing and practicing many aspects of the research process, including: selecting participants; collecting data through interviews, survey and focus groups; analyzing the data; and presenting the findings.

The research plans of this study have been influenced by the class pilot research project in different ways. For example, the pilot project helped me to identify gaps in my literature review and theoretical framework which I set about to fill. Also, I noticed that some of the participants who were too new to life in the U.S. or who were at the beginning of their academic program did not provide me with rich information compared to those who were further along in their graduate studies. Therefore, I decided to limit the research participants to include only Saudi females who have already graduated with a master's degree in an English-related field. In addition, the pilot project inspired me to conduct a multi-case study to examine the educational experiences of Saudi females who graduated not only from U.S universities, but also from Saudi universities. I also refined my interview questions to generate more information by creating more relaxed interviews that would seem like a conversation, rather than following a strict list of questions that often made the interview more formal and potentially less productive. To sum up, this class pilot project helped me develop many ideas and gain many skills and insights that were valuable to this study.

Methods of Data Collection

Case study research requires extensive data collection and depends on multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2013). Data collection methods in case study research include: interviews, observations, and analyzing documents and artifacts. For this study, I

triangulated different types of data. Triangulation is “an examination of how different sources of data on the same topic may complement each other to deepen understanding of a study topic” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 99). Triangulation helps the researcher to reduce the bias of a specific method and increase the validity of the study’s conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). To have in-depth understanding of the two cases in this multi-case study, I used two methods of data collection: (a) in-depth semi-structured interviews, and (b) document analysis.

Interviews

My primary method for data collection was in-depth semi-structured interviews. Through the use of interviews, I was able to explore the participants’ views, attitudes and perspectives on their experiences. Interviews enabled me to get thick and rich information and achieve depth of understanding about the complexity of the participants’ experiences in the two different international contexts of Saudi Arabia and the United States (Bloomberg & Voipe, 2016; Mason, 2002). Interviewing is a good data collection method when the researcher cannot observe the phenomenon he/she investigates (Bloomberg & Voipe, 2016; Lapan et al., 2012; Mason, 2002). In this study, interviewing was a good method because I could not observe the experiences and the interpretations of the Saudi participants in either national context.

The *semi-structured* interviews included flexible questions; however, they were guided by issues related to the study. The interviews included “a mix of more and less structured” questions (Merriam, 2009, p. 89) that seemed more like an informal conversation or a dialogue that allowed for flexibility and exploration (Lapan et al., 2012; Mason, 2002). According to Merriam (2009, p. 90), this type of interview “allows the researcher to respond

to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.”

To generate rich information, I kept in mind that the questions of the interviews should be open-ended, neutral and not leading. I started with questions that were descriptive and less sensitive, moving on to more sensitive and focused questions (Lapan et al., 2012). In addition, I used different types of questions to elicit information, such as: hypothetical questions, devil’s advocate questions, ideal position questions, interpretive questions, probing questions, and warm-up questions (Glesne, 2016; Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009). See the interview questions in Appendix A and Appendix B.

Interview process. I planned to conduct two one-hour, in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews with each participant. However, all ten participants preferred to have one two-hour interview instead of two one-hour interviews. So, I conducted ten interviews, one with each participant; each interview lasted around two to two and a half hours. Six interviews were face-to-face, the exact location and time was determined by the participant. Five interviews took place in a Saudi university library and one interview was held in a coffee shop. The other four interviews were conducted by phone - one participant lived in Abha, which was far away from the city where I live (Dammam), and three other participants preferred having the interview by phone because they were too busy to meet. All the interviews were audiotaped, after getting the participants’ consent. I used a voice recorder, which I tested before conducting the interviews. Also, I used the voice recording application in my smart phone as a backup. All the interviews were transcribed.

Conducting interviews requires “researcher skill” (Bloomberg & Vope, 2016, p. 173). Although I am a novice researcher, during the last five years I have been trained to conduct

interviews in some of my graduate classes in the Department of Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies (LLSS). In addition, I conducted interviews with Saudi female students in my pilot study. Thus, the interview questions were tested in the pilot study, and I got feedback from my instructor. Moreover, as I share with the participants the same local language, culture and religious faith, I was able to be culturally and linguistically sensitive during the interviews, and “interact appropriately by the cultural standards” of the participants (Glesne, 2016, p. 111). I tried to be a good listener who was open to recognizing new perspectives and views. Also, I tried to have the “role of the collaborator whose conversational actions facilitate others in the telling of their stories” (Glesne, 2016, p. 113).

Finally, the participants were given the choice to be interviewed in English or in Arabic. Although the participants all have master’s degrees in fields related to the English language, I wanted to make sure that the participants could use the language they felt more comfortable with, the language that expressed their thoughts, perspectives and experiences more effectively. For that reason, I gave the participants the chance to choose the language they preferred. As a result, most of the interviews (seven out of ten) were conducted in Arabic (with heavy code-switching between Arabic and English).

In a follow-up question, I asked each participant why she chose to be interviewed in Arabic. Two participants stated that they preferred to speak Arabic with Arabic speakers. For example, one participant stated: “There was no reason to speak English. Why I had to speak English with you if you can speak Arabic! Arabic is our language” (Nadia, November 6, 2018). Another participant said: “Personally, I don’t prefer to use the English language with Arabic speakers. I used some English terms because I have not used their equivalents in Arabic before; I learned them in English” (Hoda, November 4, 2018). All other participants

reported that the Arabic language was the language that expressed more effectively their feelings when they reflected on their experiences. The three participants who were interviewed in English stated that they used the English language because they wanted to help me as a researcher to have English interviews without the need for translating.

Thus, having seven interviews out of ten in the Arabic language (Saudi dialect) and then presenting the findings in English required the use of translation. After transcribing and analyzing the interviews, I only translated the quotes of the participants that I cited in this study (I did not translate the entire Arabic transcripts). Consequently, most of the quotes cited in this study were translated from Arabic into English. I put (E) at the end of each quote that was said originally in English and did not require any translation.

Documents

Gathering and analyzing documents from the participants was another source of data in this study. According to Bloomberg & Vope (2016), “the term document is broadly defined to cover an assortment of written records, visual data, artifacts, and even archival data” (P. 157). I asked each participant to write a document that included her statements of goals for the master’s degree, and to identify three to four challenges that she faced during her master’s degree. I told each participant that if she was able to provide me with her letter of intent that she used to apply for her master’s degree, that would serve as a document, too. I planned to analyze these documents to help me examine the participants’ purposes for graduate studies and to inquire whether they were able to achieve the goals they mentioned in their intent letters or their written documents. I thought that this might provide insight into some of the challenges they faced. However, I received only three documents from the ten participants. All three of these documents were letters of intent written by participants who

graduated from American universities. I sent three reminders to the participants, but I received nothing more. Unfortunately, analyzing only three documents did not generate rich data compared to the data I gathered from the ten interviews.

Methods of Analysis

According to Glesne (2016), “data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so you can figure out what you have learned and make sense of what you have experienced” (p. 183). Data analysis is a deductive and inductive process. As a deductive process, I was able to notice some initial themes and patterns that deductively emerged from the literature review I had done and my personal experience as the researcher. It was also an inductive process because, after obtaining the data and starting to analyze and code them, themes and patterns began to emerge inductively from the data itself (Bloomberg & Voepel, 2016).

Because this study is a multi-case study, there were two stages of analysis: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. In the within-case analysis, “each case is first treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself” (Merriam, 2009, p. 204). I used *thematic analysis* to analyze every single subcase within each major case by providing detailed description and themes of the subcase. Then, I compared the emerged themes from the subcases to generate themes from each major case. After the analysis of each major case was done, cross-case analysis began by focusing on the similarities and differences across the cases of the study to come up with themes from the entire data (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Miles et al., 2014).

Thematic analysis is a good method to provide thick description and understand the complexity within each case (Bloomberg & Voepel, 2016). “A strength of thematic analysis is

its ability to help reveal underlying complexities as you seek to identify tensions and distinctions, and to explain where and why people differ from a general pattern” (Glesne, 2016, p. 184). Thematic analysis depends on coding to generate themes. Coding is defined by Lapan et al. (2012, p. 98) as “the classification of elements in text data into categories that are related to the study topic.”

Thematic analysis consists of two levels of coding: the *first cycle* is “summarizing the segments of data”, and the *second cycle* is “grouping these summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 86). Following Creswell’s (2013) steps of analysis, in the first cycle I read each transcript and document line by line (Glesne, 2016) to get a sense of the data I had. I tried to be open and put aside my assumptions and theoretical framework (Glesne, 2016). With careful reading, I wrote notes on the margins of these documents. These notes reflected concepts or ideas that were found in the data. The next step was moving from reading and writing notes to classifying and interpreting the data by creating a list of initial codes/categories and labeling them as I read. The codes included both information that I expected to find before the study began and also surprising information that I had not expected (Creswell, 2013). This first cycle coding was applied to each embedded subcase immediately after collecting each piece of data.

The second cycle coding took place after collecting all the data needed for this study and included more focused analysis. I reread the list of initial codes/categories I had created in the first cycle for each subcase, then I reduced and combined them into small and manageable *themes*. In order to reduce the codes to themes, I tried to move from the particular to the general, and from the real to the abstract (as cited in Glesne, 2016). I tried to see the big picture by drawing connections between the data I had, my theoretical framework,

and the research questions of this study. Labeling the themes was done by choosing the labels that best described the information (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016). Also, I added third cycle coding. In this third cycle coding, I compared the emerged themes from the subcases within each case. I analyzed these emerged themes by looking at the similarities and differences between the subcases to generate themes from each major case (see Figure 3.2.).

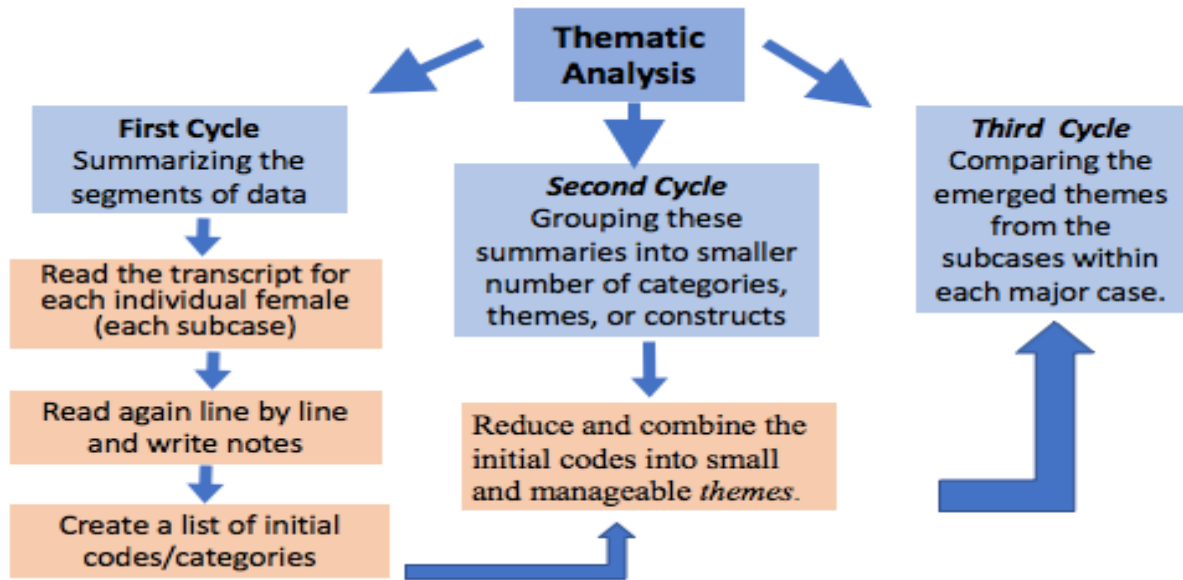


Figure 3.2. Thematic analysis used in the study.

After finishing the data analysis of each case by applying the steps I have discussed above, I started the cross-case analysis by looking at similarities and differences across both cases to generate themes from the entire data of the two cases of this study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Miles et al., 2014). According to Merriam (2009):

Cross-case analysis differs little from analysis of data in a single qualitative case study. The level of analysis can result in a unified description across cases; it can lead to categories, themes, or typologies that conceptualize the data from all the cases. (Merriam, 2009, p. 204)

Finally, I used matrices to help note different themes and patterns from the experiences of Saudi women in the two cases. The matrices were useful in comparing and contrasting the different themes I had from each case. I used Miles et al.'s (2014) book, which is a good source that discussed different fundamental principles of designing matrices that help the researcher to analyze and present the conclusions.

The Researcher's Positionality

Researcher's Identity

It is my intention to describe my positionality after discussing the literature review and the methodology of this study. I want my reader to have an idea about the Saudi context that shapes Saudi women like myself. Born to a Moroccan mother and a Saudi father, I have been raised between two cultures. I went back and forth between Saudi Arabia and Morocco until I was six years old. When I started my schooling in Saudi Arabia, opportunities to visit Morocco were limited to summer vacations. Then, moving to the United States to earn my master's and Ph.D. degrees, I found myself in another new context that influenced me personally and academically.

In Saudi Arabia, I was raised in a middle-class and highly educated family in a religious, conservative, and mostly homogeneous society. I am a Sunni Muslim, and I consider myself to be a moderate Muslim (not radical/extremely conservative and not liberal). I studied in Saudi classrooms where my instructors and classmates were all Muslim females wearing modest uniforms and speaking the Arabic language. In these classrooms, I was a passive receiver of knowledge under what is called the teacher-centered approach. This approach deprived me of the opportunity to discuss or even use my English language, which was my major during my bachelor's degree.

In Morocco, which lies in the Western Mediterranean region of North Africa, the culture is a blend of Arab, Indigenous Berber, and European influences. There, I lived in a hard-working environment with self-educated and self-made people. Although Morocco is more liberal and diverse compared to Saudi Arabia, my mother's family members were conservative Muslims. I still remember how often they expressed their appreciation to the religious and educational system in Saudi Arabia. They discussed how I was lucky to be able to visit the two holy mosques in Saudi Arabia without paying a large amount of money for tickets or worrying about having a visa. They mentioned many times how I was lucky to live in a country that provides a hijab-friendly environment, gender segregated places, where women can be educated and employed in women-only places without wearing the hijab or competing with men. Thus, in these two different cultural contexts, I was raised with a strong sense of identity, feeling blessed and proud of who I am as a Saudi Muslim woman.

In 2012, I was awarded a scholarship from the Saudi government to pursue my education in the United States. I found myself for the first time in a Western liberal and culturally diverse society. I had to sit side by side with other Saudi and international male students. In these mixed and diverse classrooms, I realized that being a passive receiver of knowledge was not working at all. Actively participating in these classes and having to use English, my second language, was a source of anxiety. Experiencing a new cultural and educational system in the United States which is totally different from that of Saudi Arabia was a challenge that I had to face.

In addition to these challenges, I noticed that there is little understanding of Saudi women, but a strong view about them as oppressed women with no agency. I always found a disconnect between what I read in Western media and intellectual articles and books about

Saudi women's experiences of oppression, and what I experienced myself as a Saudi woman or what I knew about other Saudi women whom I have met in my life. Although I have had many conversations with Saudi women critiquing some policies in Saudi Arabia regarding women's issues, not one of them has mentioned or expressed a feeling of being a voiceless victim; not one of them has blamed Islam for being her source of oppression. I noticed that when Western media represented Saudi women, it mostly represented two opposite extremes: a Saudi woman who was an oppressed voiceless victim, or a high class Saudi liberal woman who was educated in the West and who expressed her rejection of all Saudi traditional and cultural practices. I do not deny the existence of these two extremes in the Saudi society, but I am also sure that there are Saudi women who have agency, enjoy their traditions and cultural values (even if these traditions seem conservative to Westerners), and seek development. Western representation of Saudi women focuses on women's experiences that show the Saudi society as oppressive and barbaric. It ignores the experiences of love, support, dignity, and connection that many Saudi women feel toward their society or male relatives. For me, it was not about being black/white or oppressed/not oppressed. I chose to do qualitative research and use postcolonial feminism as a theoretical framework because it could help me discuss that women's experiences are complex.

It seems that life in the United States offers an opportunity for women to gain some freedom. For me, that has not been the case. In Saudi Arabia, I can go to the gym, swimming pool, and beauty salon, but not in the United States (veiled women wear the veil when they go outside their homes or when in contact with men who are not their male relatives. Unlike Saudi Arabia, these places in the United States have no section for women only, where veiled women can take off their veil). The first time I felt that I was a second-class citizen, a

minority, and different was in the United States. The first time I felt unsafe was in the United States when many Muslims, especially veiled women, reported many racial attacks after the presidential election in 2016. For me, Saudi Arabia is not only my homeland, it is the place where I feel safe and supported. My criticisms of many cultural and educational practices in my country are made simply as an effort to suggest positive changes to make it a better place for my children and grandchildren to live.

On the other hand, having the opportunity to live abroad in a Western and diverse society has given me the chance to be stronger, more independent, a hard worker, and able to handle more responsibilities as a wife, mother, and scholar. Having my Master's in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from the Department of Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies (LLSS) taught me so much in a very short time. I was exposed to issues of diversity, which helped me to be more open and strive to learn about new cultures, and more importantly, to respect the "other." From being a passive receiver of knowledge in classrooms, I became an active learner who now has many skills for discussing, arguing, and critiquing. Also, I have developed many skills in learning and teaching English as a second language.

Researcher as Insider-Outsider

My personal experience, as well as conversations with my Saudi female friends in Saudi Arabia and the United States about the difficulties and opportunities they had as Saudi female graduate students, motivated me to examine Saudi women's experiences in these two different educational settings of Saudi Arabia and the United States. My positionality as a researcher differed according to the context of this study. For example, when I examined the experiences of Saudi women who graduated from American universities, I considered myself

an “inside insider”. Although there were some differences in age, social status (married/single/mother), and family background, I shared with the participants the same language, religious faith, gender, nationality, socioeconomic class, and even the academic discipline. We are all Muslim Saudi women (minority) who earned a master’s degree in the United States. We had the same Saudi scholarship. We had some similar concerns and shared some unique challenges.

On the other hand, when I examined the educational experiences of Saudi females who graduated from Saudi universities, I had a different positionality. Although the participants and I shared the same language, religious faith, nationality, socioeconomic class, and gender, being a researcher who has been educated in the U.S. affected my positionality as an insider. Thus, I considered myself as an “inside outsider”. The participants and I received our master’s degrees in two different educational settings; therefore, our experiences as female graduate students were totally different.

The insider status of my positionality gave me the chance to provide rich and detailed descriptions about these participants. However, to some extent, it imposed a difficulty in describing some information because I took this information for granted. Also, my outsider status as a Saudi scholar who is exposed to life and higher education in the U.S. gave me the chance to critically examine and see many issues regarding women’s education in and beyond the Saudi setting. That helped me to ask more questions to the participants about their experiences in Saudi Arabia and suggest many implications to improve education in this country.

The Researcher-Participant Relationship

According to Maxwell (2013), the relationship between the researcher and the participants is “a complex and changing entity” (p. 91) which can facilitate or constrain the research. The fact that I shared with the participants the same language, religious faith, nationality, socioeconomic class, and gender helped me to get access, present myself as a researcher, and get acceptance. Two of the participants in this study are my friends; one of them graduated from an American university, and the other one graduated from a Saudi university. These two friends supported me and helped me to get access to other participants in this study. To develop productive relationships with participants that could allow me to ethically gain the data I needed to answer my research questions, first I was careful to clearly explain to them the purpose of this study and how I would protect their privacy and confidentiality. In addition, I had the role of the learner who strived to learn from the participant, to listen to them carefully, and appreciate their views and perspectives. Glesne (2016) states: “[Y]our new understandings -achieved through your learner’s stance, your flexibility, and your emphasis on making the strange familiar and the familiar strange- provide new vantage points with wider horizons, new ways of thinking about some aspects of social interaction” (p. 68). Also, by having the participants’ phone numbers and informally communicating with them by WhatsApp, I was able to develop a very good relationship with them, that I hope can last and not be limited to this study.

Validity Threats and Increasing Trustworthiness

According to Maxwell (2013), validity is “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p.122).

Actually, there is no complete agreement on the use of the term *validity* among qualitative

researchers. Glesne (2016) discussed that qualitative researchers tend to use the term trustworthiness instead because validity is more associated with quantitative research. Maxwell discussed that we cannot depend on the methods we use in research to completely assure validity. However, we should think about validity as an important component of research design.

In qualitative research, specific validity threats that can affect the conclusions need to be identified. According to Maxwell (2013), validity threats are “particular events or processes that could lead to invalid conclusions” (p.124). Maxwell (2013) discussed two validity threats that often occur in qualitative studies: researcher’s bias and effect of the researcher on the study participants (reactivity).

For this study, I think there were some validity threats that I need to identify (see validity matrix for this study in Appendix C). The first validity threat that concerned me was my bias as a researcher. Since in qualitative research the researcher is acknowledged to be the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, the researcher’s biases might impact her study. As I was aware of the positionality and background that I brought to this research, I planned to monitor my biases instead of claiming objectivity (Bloomberg & Voepel, 2016; Glesne, 2016; Merriam, 2009). First, I bracketed my personal experiences, and I tried to be open and put aside my assumptions when analyzing and interpreting the data. For example, I had a very positive educational experience, and I did not experience any discrimination at the American university where I earned my master’s degree. However, one of the participants in this study reported that she experienced discrimination by some of her U.S. instructors during her master’s program in the United States. In addition, during my master’s program and even my doctoral program, I only went to the campus when I had classes. I spent most of my days

at home where I worked on my assignments and spent more time with my children. On the other hand, many participants in this study made a different choice; they reported that they spent most of their days on campus to study in study groups and finish their assignments. Thus, I did not let my personal experience prevent me from acknowledging and reporting the participants' different experiences.

In addition, I was determined to let themes emerge from the data, whether these themes were expected or surprising. Also, I provided detailed descriptions of the experiences of the participants as they were told to me. Moreover, I used member checking to get feedback from the participants about the data and the emerging findings. Maxwell (2013) stated that this member checking is "the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on" (pp. 126-127). The member checking went on until I submitted my dissertation. All the clarifications and answers that I gathered from the member checking were considered data in this study.

The second validity threat of this study was the participants' reactivity. According to Maxwell (2013), it is impossible to eliminate the researcher's influence on the participants. However, to deal with this validity threat, I was careful during the interviews to not use any leading questions. Instead, I used open-ended questions, hypothetical questions, devil's advocate questions, ideal position questions, interpretive questions, probing questions, and warm-up questions. These questions generated rich information, minimized both the researcher's bias and influence, and gave the participants a chance to discuss topics related to the study (Glesne, 2016; Lapan et al., 2012; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Another validity threat was the limitation of the time of this study. I spent only Summer 2018, which is about four months, collecting data. Thus, I was not able to develop long-term involvement with participants in this short time. In lieu of adequate time, I asked the participants to keep in touch even after the data collection by using the different social networks such as WhatsApp. This gave me a chance to interact with them and ask them for clarifications or to answer some questions I had during the study analysis (member checking).

In addition, translating the participants' quotes, which I cited in this study, from Arabic to English was another validity threat. However, "the translator's linguistic competence and knowledge of the participants' culture influences the quality of the translation" (as cited in Alsabatin, 2015, p.39). Actually, while the Arabic language is my native language, I am a fluent English speaker. The English language was my major in my bachelor's degree, master's degree and currently in my Ph.D. program. In addition, I share with the participants the same Saudi culture. Therefore, I think I was able to "reduce the loss of meaning" and to increase the validity of the translation.

With participants and the main researcher speaking the same language, no language differences are present in data gathering, transcription and during the first analyses, because usually the first coding phase stays closely to the data. The first language differences may occur when interpretations are being discussed among members of a multinational research team. (Nes, Abma, Jonsson & Deeg, 2010, p. 314)

Finally, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to a wider population. This study only represents ten Saudi females' voices who share many cultural, religious, and

socioeconomic characteristics. The participants cannot be a representative sample of all Saudi females who have graduated with master's degrees from the U.S. or Saudi Arabia. Since the aim of this multi-case study is not to generalize its findings, I think this number of participants enabled me to get a more focused and a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants in each case, which is the aim of this study. This multi-case study can lead to transferability. The findings of the two cases of this study can be transferred to similar situations or cases (Merriam, 2009).

In general, to increase the trustworthiness of this study, I used the following strategies: (a) triangulation: by having two methods of data collection: interviews and document analysis, (b) member checking: by contacting the participants to get feedback about the data and the emerging findings, and (c) providing thick description when describing the participants and reporting the findings of this study, in the next chapters (Bloomberg & Voepel, 2016; Glesne, 2016; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the interview questions were tested in my pilot study, which hopefully increased the trustworthiness of this study. Finally, although I am a novice researcher, during the last five years I have been trained to conduct some qualitative methods of data collection, such as interviewing and observations, in several research classes in the Department of Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies (LLSS). These experiences advanced the research skills I needed to conduct this multi-case study.

Ethical Issues

As a qualitative researcher, I needed to consider some ethical issues that could affect this study. According to the Belmont Report published by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, there are three ethical

principles that should be addressed when conducting a research that involves human subjects: (a) respect (treating the participant with respect), (b) beneficence (maximizing the participant's possible benefits and minimizing harm), and (c) justice (ensuring that the participant will benefit from the research and they will not be exploited) (Glesne, 2016; Lapan et al., 2012). Based on these three principles, I am responsible for protecting the potential participants in this study.

First, before collecting data, I asked each participant to sign an informed consent (see Appendix D). In this written form, I familiarized the research participants about the purpose, the procedures and the significance of this study. I explained that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study whenever they wanted. In addition, I ensured that participants' privacy was protected by being careful to not discuss any information I procured during the data collection with any person. I saved the acquired data on a password protected laptop. When writing up the study, I made sure to use pseudonyms and avoid any descriptive characteristics that could identify the participant.

In addition, I made sure that the participants felt comfortable during the interviews. I asked the participants to choose the setting of the interview, and to choose the time that worked for them and the place where they felt most comfortable. Also, this study did not pose any physical harm to the participants. Also, I informed the participants before starting the interviews that they had the right to not answer any question they did not like or that could lead to any emotional harm. Yet, during the interviews one participant became emotional and cried when she discussed her feeling of guilt for being too busy to spend time with her baby when she was in the U.S. pursuing her master's degree.

Conclusion

The methodology of this study was described in detail in this chapter. In addition to discussing the methods of data collection and data analysis, this chapter presented my positionality as a researcher and explained some validity threats and ethical issues related to the study. The next chapters will provide the findings of this multi-case study. Chapter 4 will discuss the findings of the first case, and chapter 5 will discuss the findings of the second case. Chapter 6 will provide a comparison between the findings of the two cases and will provide an analysis of the two cases based on postcolonial feminism. Finally, Chapter 7 will conclude this study by discussing some recommendations and the limitations of this research.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: FIRST CASE (THE EXPERIENCES OF SAUDI FEMALES WHO GRADUATED FROM AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES)

This chapter presents the findings from the first case in the study, which focuses on the experiences of five Saudi females who graduated with a master's degree (MA) in an English language related field from American universities. Each participant in this case is a sub-case or an embedded case. To help the reader gain a contextualized understanding of the findings from this case, the chapter begins with a description of the research participants, and then presents three major themes that emerged from the experiences of these Saudi females.

Participants' Descriptions

The five participants in this first case all have a master's degree in an English language related field from five different American universities. They all spent less than five years achieving their master's degree in the United States (less than two years in a pre-English intensive program before beginning a master's degree program and two years obtaining a master's degree). The participants' ages range between 28 to 35 years old, and most of them are married with children. All the participants had been exposed to English language education in Saudi public schools beginning in middle school. However, two participants had been exposed to English at home because their fathers were fluent English speakers. Four of the participants had a full scholarship from the King Abdullah Scholarship program (KASP), and one was a teaching assistant (TA) at the Saudi university that sponsored her. All five participants mentioned they wanted to pursue higher education to obtain an academic job at a Saudi university. Currently, they are all lecturers at Saudi universities. Table 4.1. provides more description of the participants (the description of the

participants when they were interviewed). To protect the participants' privacy, I used pseudonyms to identify them.

Table 4.1.

Description of the Participants in this Case

Name of the Participant	Home City	Marital Status and Children	MA Major	University Location in U.S.	Year of Graduation
Noof	Dammam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married • One child 	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education (CLDE)	University in the West	2012
Ibtihal	Dammam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married • Two children 	TESOL	University in the Southeast	2014
Shahad	Abha	Single	Applied Linguistics	University in the Midwest	2015
Afnan	Al-Hasa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married • Three children 	Linguistics	University in the Southwest	2016
Khawater	Al-Qqasim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married • One child 	ESOL	University in the West	2016

Participants' Religious and Economic Contexts

All five participants in this case, and actually all ten participants in this study, are Sunni Muslims. Also, all five participants in this case are veiled (wear hijab in and outside their home country). In addition, all five participants in this case, and also the five participants in the second case, identified themselves as middle-class women. As mentioned in the literature review, the Saudi middle class “is the largest bloc within the Saudi class pyramid, as it occupies 66 percent of this pyramid approximately” (Alnuaim, 2013, p. 35).

It was challenging for me to describe the participants racially. The U.S. racial categories such as White, Black, Native, Asian, etc. cannot be applied in Saudi Arabia. I did not find any references describing Saudi people in terms of race. Most of the references that included demographic information about Saudi Arabia reported that most Saudi people (90 %) ethnically are Arabs, and only 10 % of Saudis are Afro-Asian (Saudis of mixed African

and Asian ancestry) (CIA, 2018). For this reason, I could not describe the participants racially.

Participants' Home Cities in Saudi Arabia and Host Universities in the U.S.

In the first part of my literature review, I described the context of Saudi Arabia to help the reader understand the experiences of the Saudi participants in this study. However, in this section, I briefly describe the participants' home cities and the host universities. Then, I present descriptions of each participant.

Participants' home cities in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has 13 provinces that are divided into more than 6000 cities (Al-Seghayer, 2015b). The largest cities in Saudi Arabia, such as Dammam, Riyadh, Jeddah, and Makkah, have more flexible rules and regulations regarding women and gender segregation than smaller conservative cities, such as Abha, Al-Hasa, Al-Qasim, and Taif. For example, women in large cities located on the Eastern and Western coasts such as Dammam and Jeddah are more exposed to Western culture, can have jobs in big Western and mixed-gender companies, and have the choice to not cover the face or to choose to wear colored abayas (*abaya* is a loose over-garment that covers the whole body except the face and hands).

On the other hand, women in smaller conservative cities do not have these same choices, and there are fewer opportunities to work in mixed-gender workplaces. Also, covering the face and wearing the black abaya is the norm in these cities. For example, Alqefari (2015) described the city of Al-Qasim as “an extremely conservative region whose inhabitants are predominantly farmers. Women from Al-Qassim have very limited contact with foreigners” (p. 235). With all this in mind, the five participants in this case came from

four different Saudi cities: Dammam, Abha, Al-Hasa, and Al-Qasim (see explanation on Figure 4.1).

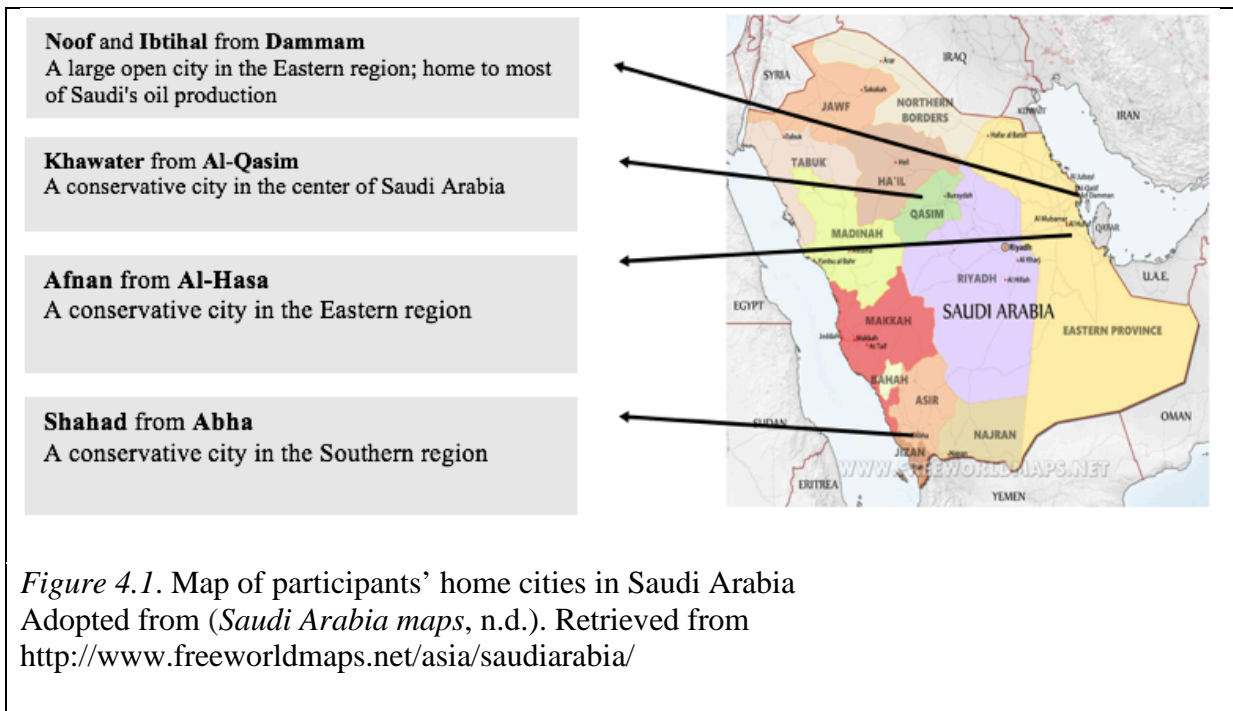


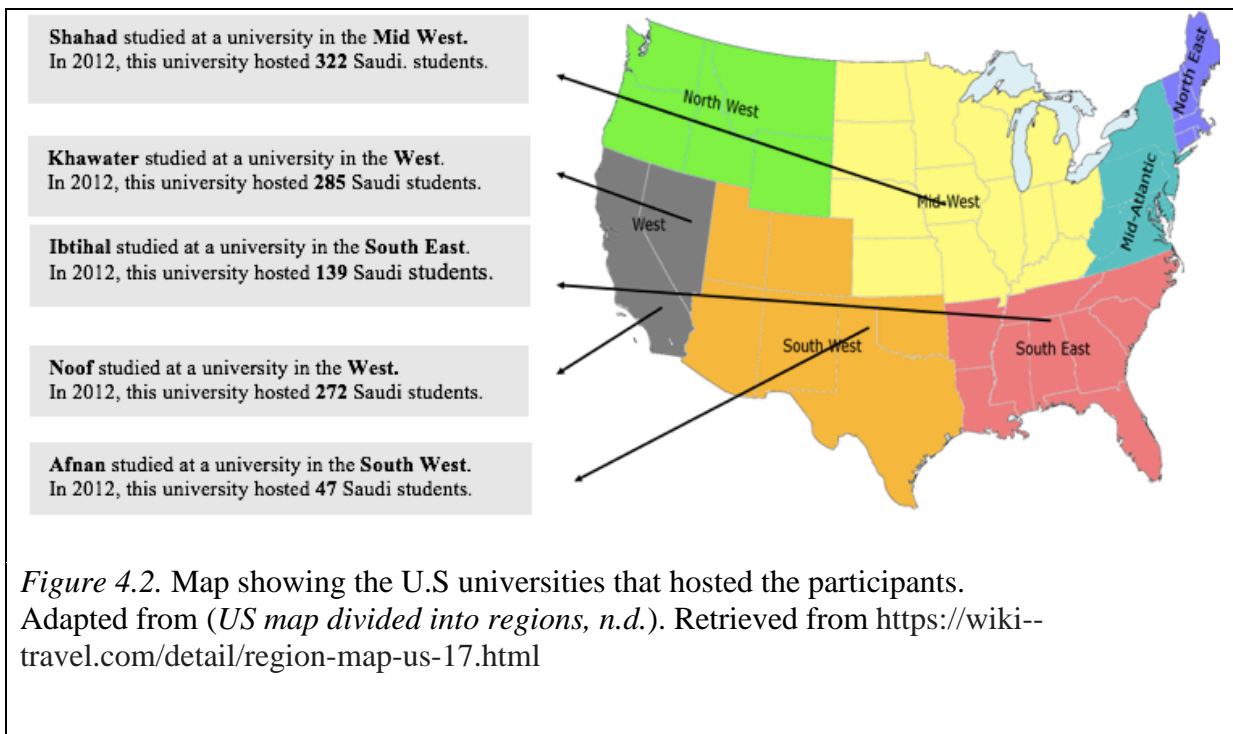
Figure 4.1. Map of participants' home cities in Saudi Arabia
Adopted from (*Saudi Arabia maps*, n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.freeworldmaps.net/asia/saudi-arabia/>

Host universities in the U.S. The five participants had master's degrees from five different American universities in different states. In addition, these five universities hosted a different number of Saudi students. The following map (Figure 4.2.) shows the locations of these universities and the number of Saudi students who studied at each university in 2012 ("College factual," n.d.), to give the reader a sense of the size of the Saudi population hosted by each university.

I chose the academic year 2012 because all the participants in this case graduated with a master's degree in years between 2012-2016. For example, Noof had a master's degree from a university in the West which hosted many Saudi students (272 students) compared to the university in the Southwest from where Afnan obtained her degree, and

which hosted a fewer number of Saudis (47 students) in the same year. This variation in the size of the Saudi student population affected these Saudi women's experiences, as I will explain later in the findings section.

Furthermore, all the participants spent two years in these universities to finish their master's degrees. Three participants finished the required coursework and passed a comprehensive exam or exit exam, while the fourth and the fifth participants (Shahada and Noof) were required to write a thesis. All the participants had the opportunity to select their academic advisors from the beginning of their journeys.



Description of Each Participant

Noof. Noof is 33 years old. She is married and has one child. Her home city is Dammam. According to Noof, her father earned a PhD from the U.S., and her mother earned a Bachelor's degree in Arabic Language from Saudi Arabia. When Noof was one-year-old,

she accompanied her family to the United States where her father pursued his graduate degrees. So, she is a fluent speaker of the English and Arabic languages. In her intent letter, Noof described her love for the English language and her desire to study in the United States:

My enthusiasm in learning about languages, especially English, has been part of me since my early childhood. I feel fortunate to have lived half of my childhood in the US. During that period, I accompanied my family to Bloomington, Indiana, USA, where my father was studying for his Master's and PhD degrees. I grew up there until I became ten years old. When my father graduated, we moved back to our home, Saudi Arabia. There was always a sense of desire inside me to go back to the US and complete even my bachelor or master's degree (E¹). (Document², June 3)

When Noof returned to Saudi Arabia at 10 years old, she continued her education in Saudi public schools. Noof obtained her Bachelor's degree (BA) in English Literature in Saudi Arabia. Besides living in the U.S. for nine years when she was a child, she has traveled extensively to many countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Before they were married, Noof's future husband had only a two-year college diploma. When he went to Noof's father to ask for her hand in marriage, the highly educated father told him that he had to pursue a higher education degree to marry his daughter. To be able to marry Noof, the future husband obtained a scholarship to study in the U.S., and in this way Noof had the opportunity to return to the U.S. with her husband to continue her studies.

¹ The symbol (E) at the end of the quote means that the quote was said/written originally in English and did not require any translation.

² This quote was from the participant's intent letter (document). The document was received on June 3, 2018.

Noof obtained her Master's degree in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education (CLDE), with a focus on Curriculum and Instruction, from a university in the West in 2012. According to Noof, she chose that university for many reasons: first, it has a very large Saudi population pursuing their degrees, and most of its faculty members were familiar with the Saudi and Muslim culture. Secondly, the U.S. state where the university was located has beautiful natural terrain that attracts most Saudis. Finally, the university did not require IELTS or TEFOL tests to gain admission. Instead, Noof was required to pass six levels in the university's ESL program, which she completed in four months. The main goal for obtaining a master's degree for Noof, besides her love for English, was to become a lecturer at one of the Saudi universities. She is currently a lecturer, and she is trying to gain admission to one of several American universities to pursue her doctoral studies.

Ibtihal. Ibtihal is 34 years old. She is married and a mother of two children. She is also from Dammam. Like other participants in this case, Ibtihal began her formal English education in middle school. However, Ibtihal was exposed to English at home because her father was an English speaker. Her father lived in the U.S. for five years to earn his bachelor's degree while her mother only finished elementary school in Saudi Arabia. Ibtihal's Bachelor's degree is in English Language. Ibtihal wanted to pursue a master's degree for this reason: "My goal was to have a job as a lecturer at a Saudi university that will sponsor me to pursue a Ph.D. degree abroad" (May 22, 2018). To achieve this goal, Ibtihal was able to obtain a full scholarship from KASP. Her husband, who is a soldier, was able to apply for a leave to accompany Ibtihal and their one-year-old daughter to the United States.

Before beginning her graduate studies, Ibtihal spent one year and four months in an ESL program in Florida trying to get the required IELTS score to apply for admission to one

of the American universities recommended by the Saudi Cultural Mission. She chose Florida because “it is a beautiful and warm state that has a lot of Saudi students.” However, the only university that offered her admission was in the Southeast, where she earned a Master’s degree in TESOL in 2014.

Unlike Noof, it was Ibtihal’s first time living in the United States and in a Western country in general. During her journey to obtain a graduate degree, Ibtihad gave birth to a second daughter. Currently, Ibtihal is a lecturer at one of the Saudi universities.

Unfortunately, her employer does not offer any scholarship for a Ph.D. program, which is why Ibtihal is seeking a job offering better opportunities.

Shahad. Shahad is 32 years old from Abha. She is single and came to the United States with her brother. Shahad’s father had a two-year college diploma, and her mother finished elementary school. Shahad did not have any exposure to English at home. She started her English education in Saudi public schools when she was about 13 years old. Her Bachelor’s degree is in English Language. Before coming to the U.S., Shahad had never been outside Saudi Arabia, and she came to the U.S. for the first time. Unlike the four other participants in this case, Shahad was a TA in a Saudi university in her city, which sponsored her to study abroad, so Shahad already had a job before studying abroad. When I asked Shahad why she wanted to pursue higher education abroad when, as she had mentioned, she had already been admitted to a master’s degree program at a Saudi university, she stated:

My goal for a long time was to become a lecturer ... I was very excited to study abroad. I wanted to improve my English in an English-speaking country. As you know, there we don’t have contact with native speakers. Also,

I wanted to be exposed to a different education...a better education. (June 15, 2018)

Before beginning her graduate studies, Shahad spent one year and four months in Florida studying in an English program to obtain the required IELTS score for university admission. The only U.S. university that offered Shahad full admission was located in the Midwest, where she earned a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics in 2015. Currently, Shahad is pursuing her PhD at a university in Britain.

Afnan. Afnan is 35 years old, from Al-Hasa. Her father had a bachelor's degree, and her mother finished elementary school. Afnan attended Saudi public schools where she was exposed to English for the first time in middle school. Afnan has a Bachelor's degree in Biology from Saudi Arabia. Coming to the U.S. was Afnan's first time here; however, she had been in different European countries as a tourist before moving to the United States for further education. She came to the U.S. with her one-year-old child and her husband, who had a scholarship and was already studying for his master's degree in the United States. She lived in the U.S. for about nine years. She lived in Ohio for two years where she took some ESL classes while her husband was working on his master's degree. When her husband moved to a university in the Southwest to obtain a doctoral degree, she was able to get admitted to the same university to earn a second Bachelor's degree in Linguistics, and also a master's degree in the same major in 2016. During her long educational journey in the U.S., Afnan gave birth to her second and third children. When her husband completed his doctoral studies, he had to return to Saudi Arabia with the three children. However, Afnan decided to remain in the U.S. for one more year to complete her doctoral coursework. Afnan explained her goal for pursuing her graduate studies as follows:

Being with my husband in the U.S. was an opportunity I did not want to waste. I wanted to improve myself and prove myself. I wanted to get out of the home. I mean, my goal was not to get a job to financially support myself, but rather to educate myself and have a role in society. (June 4, 2018)

Currently, Afnan is a lecturer in a Saudi university while working on her doctoral proposal. Afnan was the only participant in this case who chose to be interviewed in English. However, the interview was full of code-switching between English and Arabic.

Khawater. Khawater is 28 years old, from Al-Qasim. Her father had a Bachelor's degree in Arabic Language, and her mother finished elementary school. Khawater had never travelled outside Saudi Arabia before coming to the U.S. with her husband, who was already a graduate student in a university in the West. From this same university, Khawater earned a Master's degree in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in 2016. Her English exposure in Saudi Arabia was limited to public school English classes beginning in middle school, and then undergraduate classes in English Language. Before enrolling in her master's degree program, she spent 6 months in a pre-English program in the same university to be able to pass the IELTS test to gain admission. Similarly, Khawater's goal for pursuing a graduate degree is to obtain an academic job:

Since I was a child, I had the desire to learn English... After getting my BA in English, I realized it was not enough to find an academic job, so I decided to pursue a master's degree. And now I am thinking about obtaining a Ph.D. to find an even better job. (May 22, 2018)

During her time in the U.S., Khawater gave birth to a child and is currently employed as a lecturer in a Saudi college.

Findings and Discussion

After coding and analyzing the data of this case, three major themes arose. The themes are *challenges on the journey*, *strategies for success*, and *a journey of transformation*.

The following table summarizes the major themes that emerged from the analysis:

Table 4.2.

The Major Themes of the First Case: (Saudi Females Who Graduated from U.S. Universities)

First Theme: Challenges on the journey	Academic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. English language 2. Transition from the Saudi education system to American education system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banking education • From memorizing to analyzing
	Cultural	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Co-educational classes
	Religious	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Being a Muslim woman in a non-Muslim country <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing discrimination and/or curiosity • Keeping limited interaction with males
	Social	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Being a Saudi woman in American society: life-style <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balancing motherhood and education • Mobility • Practicing self-care
Second Theme: Strategies for success	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Being resilient <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting goals and moving toward them (making realistic plans, setting priorities, and time management) • Self-confidence 2. Developing intercultural competence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive attitude toward the host culture (respect, openness and discovery) • Cultural self-awareness • Adaptability and flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ guardian/mahram ○ Saudi female friends ○ Advisors and instructors ○ University resources and services ○ Religious faith
Third Theme: A journey of transformation	Personal transformation Academic transformation	

First Theme: Challenges on the Journey

Moving from Saudi Arabia to the U.S. to obtain a graduate degree was a journey full of challenges. The data presented five challenges most of the participants had to face. These five challenges can be classified as *academic*: (1) English language, and (2) the transition from Saudi education to U.S. education; *cultural*: (3) studying in co-educational classes; *religious* (4) American perception of Saudi/ Muslim women, and *social*: (5) being a Saudi woman in American society, including life-style.

Challenge 1: English Language

In general, there is a lack of exposure to the English language in Saudis' social lives and daily activities because of the dominance of the Arabic language. Exposure to the English language in Saudi Arabia is limited to English classes at schools. All five participants were enrolled in Saudi public schools. English classes in Saudi public schools started in middle school (when the participants were about 13 years old). However, two participants, Noof and Ibtiha, were exposed to English at home. Noof developed fluency in English because she lived in the U.S. for years during her childhood. Also, Noof used the English language at home with her father and sisters. In addition, although Ibtiha had never been in an English-speaking country before going to the U.S. to pursue her graduate degree, she stated that her father spoke English because he lived in the U.S. for five years. Ibtiha was exposed to English at home by her father, but she reported that this was not enough to make her a fluent English speaker. Table 4.3. and Table 4.4. show the participants' experiences with English in Saudi Arabia and the United States.

Table 4.3.

Participants' Family Educational Background and Exposure to English at Home and School in Saudi Arabia

Name of the Participant	Family Educational Background	Exposure to English at Home	English Education in Saudi Public Schools
Noof	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Her father earned a Ph.D. in the U.S. o Her mother had a Bachelor's degree in Arabic Language. 	She was a fluent English speaker. She spoke English with her father and sisters at home.	-Public school English classes -BA in English Literature
Ibtihal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Her father lived in the U.S. for five years to earn his bachelor's degree. o Her mother finished elementary school in Saudi Arabia. 	Her father exposed her to English, but she was not a fluent English speaker.	-Public school English classes -BA in English Language
Shahad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Her father had a two-year college diploma. o Her mother finished elementary school. 	_____	-Public school English classes -BA in English Language
Afnan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Her father had a bachelor's degree. o Her mother finished elementary school. 	_____	-Public school English classes
Khawater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Her father had a Bachelor's degree in Arabic Language. o Her mother finished elementary school. 	_____	-Public school English classes -BA in English Language

Table 4.4.

Participants' Experiences with English Language in the U.S.

Name of the Participant	Length of Time in Pre-English Program	Length of Time to Finish MA
Noof	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 months - Passed 6 levels in pre-English program 	Two years
Ibtihal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One year and six months - Passed IELTS test 	Two years
Shahad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One year and four months - Passed IELTS test 	Two years
Afnan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One year in ESL - IELTS was not required for MA because she had a BA in Linguistics from the same university 	Two years
Khawater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Six months - Passed IELTS test 	Two years

Even Noof, who went to the U.S. when she was one year-old and lived there until she was ten years old, was enrolled in Saudi public schools when she returned to her native country. Actually, Noof was the only participant in this study who mentioned that the English language was not a challenge she had to overcome. According to Noof, she was already a fluent English speaker. Also, the U.S. university Noof applied to did not require the IELTS test, and she only had to pass six levels in the university's pre- English program to gain admission.

On the other hand, all four of the other participants mentioned that gaining proficiency in English and passing the IELTS test were the first challenges to overcome on their journey. Despite the fact that Ibtihat's father exposed her to English at home when she was a child, she mentioned that she did not develop fluency in English, and it was difficult to pass the IELTS test when she was in the United States. Although four of the participants in this case had a bachelor's degree in English in Saudi Arabia, most of them declared that when they came to the U.S., they had low English proficiency and they had a difficult time trying to pass the required IELTS test. The main reason given by most of them was that their undergraduate classes did not help them improve their English proficiency and did not prepare them for studying in the United States. For example, Khawater stated: "The classes we took in the BA had nothing to do with our daily life, as we were discussing Shakespeare...Also, most of the instructors who taught us were not qualified" (May 22, 2018). Ibtihal repeated, "My BA did not prepare me to study in America. Everything I studied [*in Saudi Arabia*] focused on poetry and prose. When I graduated, I did not know what a topic sentence or thesis statement is" (May 22, 2018).

As a result, many participants shared that they had to spend from six months to a year and a half trying to improve their English and pass the IELTS test before beginning their graduate degree programs. Khawater stated, “When I went to the U.S., I had to improve my language and start all over again” (May 22, 2018). Ibtihad similarly said, “In America, I had to start from zero. I was working on myself...It took me a year and half to get the required score for IELTS” (May 22, 2018). And Shahad added, “Most universities required high IELTS scores. It was very difficult for me. For one year and four months, I was under intense pressure until I passed it” (June 15, 2018).

The time spent in pre-English programs helped some participants not only improve their English conversation skills, but also learn some basic academic skills they needed in their graduate programs later. For instance, Shahad stated that the instructors in the ESL program helped her improve her academic writing: “They taught us how to write an annotated bibliography and how to write an argumentative essay...I learned how to write a summary and differentiate between details and main ideas” (June 15, 2018). Similarly, although Noof was fluent in English, the pre-English program helped her learn some skills, such as “presenting, using library and citing” (May 23, 2018).

By contrast, btihal, and Khawater did not get the same benefit from the pre-English program they attended. Instead, they had to depend upon themselves to improve their English beyond the classroom. Ibtihal and Khawater tried to improve their English language by “having native speaker friends” (Khawater, May 22, 2018), and “reading, and practicing the language” (Ibtihal, May 22, 2018).

Unlike the participants in this case who had bachelor’s degree in English language in Saudi Arabia, Afnan’s had a Bachelor’s degree in Biology in Saudi Arabia. When she came

to the U.S., she had no English language proficiency. However, Afnan spent nine years in the U.S. which helped her to improve her English language skills. Afnan mentioned in her intent letter: “I used to watch movies and listen to music in English. In other words, via creating these self-study methods, I was a TESOL teacher for myself (E)” (Document, October 1). Afnan spent one year in an ESL program trying to pass the IELTS or TOEFL test, but she could not. According to her, staying in the ESL program was “a waste of time (E)” (June 4, 2018). However, Afnan did not give up; she found out that if she passed English101 and 102 in a community college, she could gain admission for a second BA degree. Afnan finished her BA in Linguistics, which helped her gain admission to the same university to begin her MA in Linguistics without the need to pass an English proficiency test.

No participant mentioned in the interviews that she spoke English with her husband (Afnan’s and Khawater’s husbands were English fluent speakers) or children. However, they mentioned that they were determined to improve their English language by exposing themselves to English material and by having American friends, as mentioned above. Also, according to most of the participants, they spent most of their days on the campus (library, writing center) to study and work on assignments in groups or alone, which helped them to develop their English language skills.

Challenge 2: The Transition from Saudi Education to U.S. Education: A Dramatic Change

Banking education. The second academic challenge most of the participants in this case faced from the very start of their journey was the transition from Saudi education that promoted passive learning and teacher-centered approaches, to U.S. education that promotes active learning and student-centered approaches. All the participants in this study were

exposed to Saudi education that depended on memorization and passing exams. Both the teacher and the student depended on the book. The teacher was expected to explain the text by traditional lecturing methods, and the student was expected to memorize what the teacher explained. That is what the participant Afnan called “banking education (E)” (June 4, 2018), by borrowing this term from Freire (1970). She was the only participant who did not find the transition from the Saudi to the U.S. education system difficult, because she obtained her second bachelor’s degree in the United States. She said she had this difficulty when she was in her bachelor’s degree program, but then became used to the American educational system by the time she began her MA.

When I asked Ibtihal about her transition from the Saudi education system to the American education system, she laughed and said, “It was a dramatic change (E)” (May 22, 2018). The first challenge most of the participants faced was the quantity of work a graduate student is expected to complete, not only before the exam but during the entire semester. Shahad explained: “The student in the U.S is occupied during the entire semester. The student has to do heavy readings, presentations, research papers, assignments, preparations for quizzes, and exams. In Saudi Arabia, the student has to study only before the exam” (June 15, 2018).

From memorizing to analyzing. Moving from a classroom where the teacher is lecturing and students are only passive receivers, to a classroom where the teacher is only a facilitator and students are active learners who have a greater responsibility to analyze, discuss, negotiate, share views, present, facilitate, and lead discussions was another challenge for most of the participants at the beginning of their graduate journey in the United States.

Shahad shared an interesting example that shows the differences in the educational environments of Saudi Arabia and the United States:

I took a phonology class in Saudi Arabia and also in the United States. The content was almost the same, but the difference was in the teaching styles. For example, in Saudi Arabia the instructor would ask you to define minimal pairs, and you have to faithfully memorize the definition and write it in the exam. But in the U.S., the instructor would give you a set of data and ask you to analyze it and find the minimal pairs and discuss that with your classmates in the class. Unlike Saudi Arabia, in the U.S. the instructor will help you understand in depth of the content, not only memorize it. (June 15, 2018)

Most of the participants felt it was extremely difficult to think critically or discuss or write a critical response. For example, Khawater said that at the beginning of her graduate degree she was listening to her classmates discussing things more than being a part of the discussion. She stated, “I was amazed how American students were able to comment on every single thing in the class” (May 22, 2018). In addition, presenting in front of the class was difficult for most of the participants. Ibtihal, Noof, and Shahad said the first time they presented formally in a classroom was in the United States. Although Khawater was used to presenting in the classroom in Saudi Arabia, she found that presenting was more challenging in American classrooms that included Saudi male students. This is another cultural challenge I will discuss next.

The only learning strategy these participants knew and practiced for years of schooling in Saudi Arabia was memorizing, which could not be applied in their new educational environments. Ibtihal and Noof described their feelings of loss and the

overwhelming challenge of trying to figure out how to prepare for a test, especially since they were exposed to different assessment methods in their host universities than Saudi traditional exams. Ibtihal stated:

Before coming to the U.S., I had not heard about something called *take home exam* or *open book exam*. So I did not know how to prepare myself for the exam or write important notes I could use during the exam. I remember my first open book exam was about four hours; however, I could not finish it on time. All this was because we did not have this kind of assessment culture in Saudi Arabia. (May 22, 2018)

Noof echoed a similar thought: “At the beginning I noticed that their way of studying was completely different from ours. It was very difficult. I felt lost, and did not know what the instructor exactly wanted, and how I should study” (May 23, 2018). Also, like most of the participants, Ibtihal mentioned how she lacked effective reading skills: “I was spending long hours finishing the assigned readings. I would read for four hours, but when I went to class, I felt that I forgot everything, as nothing was in my mind” (May 22, 2018).

Most of the participants explained they had to learn many skills that graduate students already must have, such as effective reading skills necessary for long reading assignments, and academic writing skills including citing, building an argument, critiquing, and writing a literature review. Even Shahad and Noof, who believed their pre-English programs helped them learn some basic skills in academic writing, had to face this transition period in which they had to free themselves of old ways of studying.

Actually, these two academic challenges - having high English proficiency to pass IELTS or TOEFL tests and navigating a different education system - were major difficulties

for many Saudi female students not only in this study, but also in other studies that focused on Saudi females' experiences abroad (Albalawi, 2013; Al-Sheikhly, 2012; Heiberger, 2017; Kampman, 2011; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Macias, 2016; Moursi, 2018; Young & Snead, 2017). All these studies discussed that Saudi females were not academically prepared to study abroad. In addition, Razek & Coyner's (2013) study indicated that many Saudi students believed they needed more than two semesters of studying English in pre-academic English programs to improve their English language proficiency before beginning their academic degrees programs. Also, most of the participants in this case needed more than one year to pass English proficiency tests to apply for university admission requirements in the United States.

Challenge 3: Co-educational Classes

Moving from Saudi society that is separated by gender to American society that is mixed-gender was one of the cultural challenges the participants had to overcome. Most of the participants in this case experienced co-educational classes for the first time in the United States. However, the participants in this study had different experiences regarding their previous familiarity with mixed-gender environments before coming to their host country. In other words, these participants had different experiences of exposure to mixed environments, such as travelling outside Saudi Arabia, working in mixed workplaces, and coming from different cities in Saudi Arabia. These included conservative cities where the mix of genders is very rare, versus large cities that have more mixed-gender places (see Table 4.5.).

Table 4.5

Participants' Familiarity with Mixed-Gender Environments and their Experiences with Co-ed Classes in the U.S.

Participant	Home City	Working Experience in Mixed Environment	Travelling Outside Saudi Arabia	Years in the U.S. (Years: Months)	Prefer Male or Female Instructor	Advisor	Attitude toward Co-ed Classes in the U.S.	Did it affect Participation in MA program?
Afnan	Al-Hasa Conservative	No	Yes	9:0	Male	Male	In pre-English program: discomfort being in classes with Saudi males <hr/> In graduate classes: gradual decrease in discomfort level but still felt <ul style="list-style-type: none">Uncomfortable being in pairs or a group with Saudi malesUncomfortable presenting in front of Saudi males (fear of being judged). Did not have same discomfort with non-Saudi males	No
Noof	Dammam Large open city	Yes	Yes	9 years as child 2: 4	Does not matter	Female	In pre-English program: discomfort being in classes with Saudi males <hr/> In graduate classes: gradual decrease in discomfort level but still felt <ul style="list-style-type: none">Uncomfortable being in pairs or a group with Saudi males Did not have same discomfort with non-Saudi males	No
Ibtihal	Dammam Large open city	No	Yes	3: 6	Does not matter	Female	In pre-English program: discomfort being in class with Saudi males - Avoided talking to Saudi males at all. <hr/> In graduate classes: gradual decrease in discomfort level but still felt <ul style="list-style-type: none">Uncomfortable being in pairs or a group with Saudi males Did not have the same discomfort with non-Saudi males.	No
Khawater	Al-Qasim Conservative	No	No	2:6	Male	Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none">In pre-English program: discomfort being in class with Saudi males <hr/> In graduate classes: gradual decrease in discomfort level but still felt <ul style="list-style-type: none">Uncomfortable being in pairs or a group with Saudi malesUncomfortable presenting in front of Saudi males (fear of being judged). Did not have same discomfort with non-Saudi males	No
Shahad	Abha Conservative	No	No	3:6	Does not matter	Female	In pre-English program: discomfort being in class with Saudi males - She kept <i>silent</i> in the ESL class. <hr/> In graduate classes: gradual decrease in discomfort level but still felt <ul style="list-style-type: none">Uncomfortable being in pairs or a group with Saudi males Did not have same discomfort with non-Saudi males.	No

Afnan is from a conservative city in Saudi Arabia, and she had no working experience in a mixed-gender workspace before coming to the United States. However, Afnan had been in many European countries as a tourist. When I asked Afnan about her reaction to the co-ed classes in the U.S., she stated: “It was very difficult. I had never studied in such an environment, especially with Saudi males” (June 4, 2018). According to Afnan, being in classes with Saudi males was a source of anxiety, especially at the beginning of her graduate studies journey. Despite the fact that Afnan had spent about nine years in U.S classrooms earning her bachelor’s and master’s degrees, she still had discomfort being in pairs or in a small group with Saudi male students in her graduate classes. Afnan disclosed that in one of her doctoral classes, the instructor divided the class into small groups based on the students’ theoretical framework interests. By chance, she was in the same group with a Saudi male. The group was supposed to meet during every class until the end of the semester. Afnan told me she was thinking about changing her theoretical framework just to avoid being in that group, but then she learned that the same Saudi male went to the instructor and explained he did not feel comfortable being with a Saudi female in the same group for cultural reasons. Although this particular incident happened during Afnan’s doctoral program, I believe it is important to mention here that even though this student was used to U.S. classrooms, she still felt a cultural barrier that caused discomfort within the confines of classroom discourse. For Afnan and *all* the four other participants in this case, they did not have this feeling of discomfort with other non-Saudi males.

Noof is from Dammam, one of the largest cities in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia where most of the oil industry and Western oil companies are located. She lived nine years of

her childhood in the United States. In addition, Noof worked in a mixed-gender Saudi company, and she had been in many Arabic and European countries for tourism before coming to the U.S. to obtain a graduate degree. Although it seems Noof had considerable exposure to mixed-gender contexts, she described her discomfort being in the same class with Saudi males, especially at the beginning of her journey in the pre-English program: “When I was in the English institute, I felt *anxiety* being with Saudi males in the same class. Actually, they felt the same, too” (May 23, 2018). Similarly, Noof reported avoiding sitting by Saudi males or being in pairs with them in her graduate classes.

Ibtihal also came from Dammam. She travelled to some neighboring countries for tourism, but she had not been in a mixed workplace. Ibtihal commented on her experience in American mixed classrooms: “It was very difficult in the English program; I did not talk to Saudi males at all. But then, when I started the master’s program, I got used to it” (May 22, 2018). When I asked her about her attitude toward being paired with a Saudi male in her graduate classes, she answered: “Of course, I would not feel comfortable being paired with a Saudi man, as I prefer being in groups with non-Saudi males” (May 22, 2018).

Khawater and Shahad were both from small Saudi conservative cities and had never been outside Saudi Arabia or in a mixed workplace before coming to the United States. Similarly, they expressed anxiety in mixed classrooms in their ESL programs that were full of Saudi males. Unlike other participants in an ESL program who only felt discomfort, anxiety, and/or who avoided talking to Saudi males in their groups, Shahad said she kept *silent* and did not participate when she was assigned to a group with Saudi males. “I felt uncomfortable being with male Saudis in the same class, but it was worse when I had them in the same group. I did not talk; I preferred remaining silent” (June 15, 2018). But when

Shahad attended graduate classes, she was able to overcome this cultural barrier and participate even if she did not feel comfortable.

Being in groups or pairs with Saudi males was not the only discomfort these participants experienced. Afnan, Khawater, and Shahad said that presenting in front of audiences was also stressful, especially audiences including Saudi males. Afnan and Khawater said they had fears of being judged. Shahad said, “I don’t know why presenting in front of Saudi males was difficult. Maybe it is the way we were raised; I think it is our customs and traditions that prevent us from presenting comfortably in front of men” (June 15, 2018).

Another point Shahad, Khawater, Ibtihal, and Noof implied was that U.S universities hosting large numbers of Saudi undergraduate students were also culturally sensitive to the traditions and needs of graduate students, such as gender segregation. Thus, some of the instructors in these universities avoided pairing Saudi females with male students. Ibtihal stated:

They know we are segregated by gender. There was a female instructor who was always visiting us and attending our parties. She knew we don’t have mixes of gender. So, in class she avoided assigning us to groups with males.

There was also a male instructor who understood this same cultural difference and did not try to group us with males either. (May 22, 2018)

On the other hand, Afnan who studied in a university with relatively few numbers of Saudi students mentioned several times in her interview that some of her instructors appeared to have a fundamental lack of awareness of Saudi culture, and thus considered them “culturally insensitive” (June 4, 2018).

As a result of these participants' remarks, I came to consider *co-educational classes* as a cultural rather than religious challenge, because all five participants indicated they do not have any problems formally interacting with their non-Saudi male classmates or instructors. Even two participants, Afnan and Khawater, said they prefer having a male instructor and/or advisor. For example, Khawater said, "Male instructors are more flexible and supportive" (May 22, 2018). Likewise, Afnan explained, "Male instructors are more flexible, and they don't focus on details like females (E)" (June 4, 2018). In addition, Afnan and Khawater did not report any difficulties dealing with their male advisors.

Based on Saudi cultural norms, the interaction between Saudi males and females is restricted, limited, and regulated. Even being away from Saudi Arabian geographical boundaries, and outside the walls of Saudi buildings separating males and females, *all* the Saudi participants in this case described remaining separated by gender in their host country. In other words, these participants continued separation by gender when meeting each other outside the classroom for an invitation, party or even going to a picnic, as these Saudi females would have gatherings separate from males.

Many studies investigating Saudi females' experiences abroad (Alhazmi, 2010; Alqefari, 2015; Alsabatin, 2015; Altamimi, 2014; Kampman, 2011; Macias, 2016; Moursi, 2018; Sandekian, Weddington, Birnbaum & Keen, 2015) discussed similar findings that Saudi females felt discomfort in classes with Saudi males. However, according to Alqefari (2015), Saudi female students from conservative cities in Saudi Arabia who have never traveled before had an even greater source of anxiety in mixed classrooms. Although Alqefari makes a reasonable point, I found that even those participants from a large open city such as Dammam, and those who were well traveled and exposed to Western culture like

Noof, felt discomfort being with Saudi males in the same group or in pairs or working on a project requiring meetings outside the classroom. In addition, Alqefari (2015) stated, “The longer a female student studied abroad, the less significant the issue of different gendered colleagues became” (p. 239). Perhaps this finding corresponds with what my participants experienced with non-Saudi males in their classes. However, all the participants still felt discomfort dealing directly with Saudi males in small group activities or in pairs, including those who had spent years in U.S classes (such as Afnan).

Moreover, Altamimi (2014), Alqefari (2015), and Moursi (2018) found that co-educational classes negatively affected Saudi females’ participation and academic engagement. The experiences of these five participants in co-ed classes showed they had different levels of discomfort/anxiety being with Saudi males in their classes. Only one participant, Shahad, reported that she kept silent in group activities in her ESL classes, but in her graduate classes full of Saudi students she was able to participate and present, even if feeling uncomfortable. The other four participants emphasized that their discomfort did not affect their participation or their confidence to express their ideas or opinions in their classes.

Challenge 4: Being a Muslim Woman in a Non-Muslim Country

It is evident from prior literature that Muslim women in non-Muslim countries face many challenges (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003). Cole and Ahmadi (2003) pointed out that female international students face “double jeopardy of being female and international” (p. 49). The participants in this case faced even more challenges: In addition to being female and international, they are Muslims whose identity was visible because they were all veiled; and they are from Saudi Arabia, a country that is portrayed in media as a land that humiliates women and deprives them of their rights. All the participants wore a headscarf. Afnan, Noof

and Shahad wore modest loose clothes while Noof and Ibtihal wore abaya. Ibtihal was fully covered including her face when she was in the pre-English program. However, when she found that covering the face was a barrier to social communication with her classmates, “It was like a barrier between them and me” (May 22, 2018), she took it off when she began her master’s degree.

Experiencing discrimination and/or curiosity. The participants’ experiences with discrimination depended upon the context of their host universities. In other words, it depended upon the size of the student Saudi population in the host university. By referring back to Map 4.2., it is clear that Ibtihal, Shahad, Khawater and Noof earned their degrees in universities that hosted a large number of Saudi students, whereas Afnan obtained her degree in a university that did not attract many Saudis. As a result, the only participant who reported experiences of discrimination was Afnan. All the other participants clearly stated they did not experience any discrimination and described their classmates and instructors as being “kind” and “friendly.” However, all participants were exposed to many situations and questions from classmates that indicated curiosity and limited knowledge about Islam and Saudi Arabia.

As I have mentioned, Afnan was the only participant who reported discrimination in her graduate program, as most of her instructors and classmates lacked awareness about Islam and Saudi culture. She stated:

Some people dealt with me based on stereotypes. They asked me about Saudi Arabia, driving, and similar issues. As I remember, I attended a meeting with well-educated people and they asked why I was studying at this level and

couldn't drive my car. This was one of the questions I was asked. (June 4, 2018)

Also, Afnan felt that *some* instructors in her department were “racists,” She added, “They always expected your level is lower than the other students (E)” (June 4, 2018). She believed these instructors “thought Middle East is one country (E)” (June 4, 2018), and women there have similar circumstances. Afnan described her annoyance when her instructor in a class discussion assumed she knew Malala Yousafzai (a Pakistani girl who was oppressed by the Taliban, and was deprived of her right to education). She expressed her annoyance because she felt people think all Muslim women are oppressed:

For him, any covered girl will represent Malala. He was surprised I did not know her. I told him: “We don't have such situations in Saudi Arabia. We have a lot of educated women to the extent they can't find jobs and they are competing to enter the job market.” (June 4, 2018)

When I asked Afnan about the difficulties she faced as a female student that did not necessarily affect her husband who was studying in the same university, she shared her feeling of isolation because of her visible female Muslim identity:

I took a class with my husband. They did not know he was my husband because we were not sitting by each other. I like to sit in front, and he likes to sit in the last row. I noticed that students had conversations with him and not with me. Then, when they knew he was my husband, they started to talk to both of us. (June 4, 2018)

She added that some of her classmates avoided sitting by her because maybe they thought she had “radical thinking (E)” (June 4, 2018).

Unlike Afnan, the other four participants reported they did not experience any discrimination during their graduate journey. However, they were exposed to comments and questions that showed their classmates' surprise having a Saudi female in an American classroom or curiosity to know about Muslim women and Saudi Arabia. To elaborate upon this point, I'll provide some examples. Ibtihal, for instance, stated: "An American classmate told me: I could not imagine myself studying with a Saudi woman. I did not know that Saudi women can pursue education, travel, and have home and husband" (May 22, 2018). In addition to hearing such comments, participants were asked some questions that indicated lack of knowledge about Muslim women. Khawater declared:

I felt they were ignorant of many things about Islam. For example, once I was in the restroom, and I was fixing my scarf. Then, a woman said, "Ohh, you have hair! You have beautiful hair! Why do you cover it?" I told her I don't cover my head because I have no hair; I cover it because of my religion. (May 22, 2018)

Also, Khawater added she was asked by another woman if she was forced to wear the veil. Khawater continued: "She said, 'You can take it off if you feel hot, as nobody is here.' I told her I choose to wear it. It is my choice" (May 22, 2018).

Shahad shared a similar situation: "I was asked how Saudi women get married while they cover the face. So, they have an idea that a Saudi woman has no consent to marriage, and that she is forced" (June 15, 2018). Noof added, "The question I was frequently asked was about driving. They always ask me why men are allowed to drive, and you are not" (May 23, 2018). Except for Afnan, these participants did not take such comments or

questions personally. They did not feel offended; rather, they felt it was a chance to correct some misconceptions about Muslim/Saudi women.

Keeping limited interaction with males. When I discussed the challenge of coeducational classes above, I pointed out that my participants felt discomfort in classes with Saudi males, especially in pairs and group activities because of traditions in their Saudi Arabia homeland. The participants indicated they did not have this discomfort with other non-Saudi males, and some of them even welcomed having a male instructor or advisor. However, based on Islamic moral code, still the interaction with all males (Saudis and non-Saudis) should be controlled and formal, with emphasis on avoiding any kind of *physical touch* such as shaking hands, hugging, tapping on the shoulder (Alsabatin, 2015). Alsabatin's study argued that many Saudi females interacted freely with American females, but they interacted in a way that "signaled space or boundaries" (p. 60) with American males to avoid any kind of touching, such as shaking hands, hugging or tapping. Also, Alsabatin's participants interacted with Saudi males in a way signaling even "more space and boundaries" (p.62-63) compared to American males. This finding was reflected in the experiences of Saudi females in this case.

Being in a classroom with male classmates and instructors can cause some "embarrassing" situations, as described by many participants. Afnan discussed that instructors and classmates were not aware that Muslim women do not shake hands with men, which put her in many embarrassing situations. She did not want to refuse shaking hands with male classmates or instructors for fear of offending them; at the same time, she wanted to be true to who she is and maintain that space. Afnan stated, "Almost every single male instructor in the department tried to shake hands. Everyone was surprised when I refused, and

I explained that for them. That limits the relationship and puts boundaries around it” (June 4, 2018).

While people in Afnan’s context appeared to lack awareness of this religious custom, other participants indicated that most people in their context were understanding and/or already aware. Shahad said, “It was very difficult at the beginning because I did not like to refuse it...Then, I started to say “sorry” or “thank you” and put my hands on my chest. They were understanding” (June 15, 2018). Khawater also shared her experience with her advisor and classmates:

Shaking hands was very embarrassing at the beginning, especially with my advisor. But then he understood we don’t shake hands. My classmates already knew I am conservative from my clothes. They sat away from me and talked to me formally. (May 22, 2018)

Ibtihal similarly stated, “The instructors and classmates did not shake hands. I felt they already knew we don’t shake hands” (May 22, 2018). Noof expressed something similar:

I don’t recall such an embarrassing situation [*about the awkwardness of shaking hands*]. I think they understood we had a different culture. Even in the graduation party when they gave the diploma, they didn’t shake hands with the girls who were veiled...In [*U.S. state*], there were lots of Saudi students. (May 23, 2018)

Experiencing discrimination, curiosity, and/or stereotyping toward Saudi females in this case matched what I found in my literature review (Arafeh, 2017; Alhajjuj, 2016; Caldwell, 2013; Heiberger, 2017; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Moursi, 2018; Razek & Coyner, 2013; Sandekian et al., 2015; Young & Snead, 2017). All these studies

reported a similar finding among their Saudi female participants. In line with Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern (2015), many Americans “seem culturally ignorant” (p.20) and have many misconceptions and overgeneralizations about Saudi women.

However, I would like to argue further that the idea of discrimination/curiosity and dealing with the opposite sex (Saudis and non-Saudis) in American classes is less challenging for participants who studied at universities with large Saudi populations, as instructors and classmates began to develop awareness about the Saudi and Muslim community and how to deal with them. That was obvious by comparing Afnan’s experience, at her university that hosted few Saudi students, with other participants’ experiences at their universities that hosted larger numbers of Saudis. While Afnan described her struggle with discrimination and instructors’ lack of cultural sensitivity, other participants expressed a less challenging context where many instructors and classmates were aware of their culture. In addition, some Saudi females in Arafeh’s (2017) and Moursi’s (2018) studies decided to hide their Muslim identity by completely taking off the veil to avoid any kind of discrimination. In this study, no participant completely took off her veil. Only Ibtihal took off her face cover when she found it an obstacle for communication in ESL classes. But still her Muslim identity was visible by wearing abaya and headscarf.

Challenge 5: Being a Saudi Woman in American Society: life-style

The participants in this case found themselves in a world different from their own. To live in the U.S. for a few years to get a degree, the participants had to experience the American way of life that was different from their familiar Saudi way of life. Balancing motherhood and education, mobility, and practicing self-care in the U.S. were different than what they experienced in Saudi Arabia. These points are discussed in the following sections.

Balancing motherhood and education. Four of the five participants in this case experienced motherhood during their journey. Being a mother while pursuing education abroad was another challenge for them. For example, Afnan described how it was very difficult for her to play different roles as a wife, mother and graduate student. Balancing these roles was challenging for her, as well as for other participants. However, the biggest challenge for Afnan was teaching her three children Arabic language and the fundamental aspects of Islamic religion in the United States. She took the three children to Islamic Sunday school every weekend to enrich their learning of the Arabic language and Islamic beliefs. However, she felt that was not enough to prepare her children for Saudi schools when they returned home. So, she provided them with Arabic tutoring during the weekdays. Afnan stated: “Teaching them Arabic in the U.S. was very hard, not like in Saudi Arabia. It was an extra responsibility not only for me, but for their father and for them –their right is to enjoy the weekend (E)” (June 4, 2018).

Khawater had a baby during her journey. She explained that most of her graduate classes were on weekends and lasted for five to six hours. Although her husband was taking care of the baby, she felt bad to leave her breastfed baby for all those hours. She added, “Sometimes my husband and I had classes at the same time. Classes usually started at five, and the daycare closes at five; so, I had to take the baby with me to some classes” (May 22, 2018).

Unlike Afnan and Khawater whose husbands were graduate students, Ibtihal’s husband was not. He took care of their baby girl when she was studying in the library in the morning and attending classes in the afternoon. When I asked Ibtihal about her experience as a parent student in the U.S., she became emotional and began to cry. She explained:

I did not enjoy my daughter. I did not see her grow up. When I see her pictures now, I can't remember her in that time. Now I remember everything about Salohi [*her second child*], his first word and everything he said, but not Noran [*her first baby in the U.S.*]. I feel guilty; I don't have any memories with her in that two years in the U.S. (May 22, 2018)

Although all these participants reported their husbands were supportive, they missed their extended family in Saudi Arabia. When I asked them how their experience as a student parent would be in Saudi Arabia, they said it would be much easier for them because they would enjoy their mothers' support or have a female helper (maid) to help with the household. Ibtihal stated, "There is always someone from the family who can help, or there is a maid" (May 22, 2018). Ibtihal and Afnan, mentioned they had a female helper before coming to the U.S. to study. Having domestic or household help in Saudi families is very common. According to Al-Seghayer (2015b, p. 64): "89% of Saudi households have at least one maid, meaning there are over 1.5 million housemaids in the Kingdom." And around 87.2% of Saudi families have a chauffeur or driver (Alkhaleej, 2014). Even if families didn't have a maid, they could seek help from their extended family. It is not unusual for mothers and sisters to help take care of children when a student parent has exams or gets sick. Saudi society is a collectivist society where the extended family has an important role in people's lives.

Balancing motherhood with academic studies was also a challenge Saudi females had to face in Alhajjuj's (2016), and Macias' (2016) studies. Alhajjuj's research focused mainly on the experiences of 14 Saudi female doctoral students who had children in the United States. Feeling guilt about not being able to spend quality time with children was one of the

obstacles the Saudi participants had to deal with in Alhajjaj's study. In addition, missing the extended family's support was also discussed by Albalawi (2013), Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern (2015) and Macias (2016). They all emphasized the importance of extended family for Saudi students who came from a collectivist culture.

Mobility. Because the women in this case did not drive in Saudi Arabia, I asked if driving imposed a challenge to them in the United States. I was surprised when they all stated it was not challenging. However, they all agreed that driving is "a must" in the United States, unlike in Saudi Arabia where there will always be an available male family member or a driver. Afnan stated her husband was responsible for driving, while Noof said she used the bus. Also, Ibtihad commented, "Driving was not a problem because my husband was not a student" (May 22, 2018). Shahad said her brother taught her to drive as soon as they arrived in the U.S., while Khawater said she already knew how to drive because her family back in Saudi Arabia had a big farm where she had the chance to learn to drive.

Some studies (Arafeh, 2017; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Razek & Coyner, 2013) indicated that Saudi women enjoyed freedom of mobility in the U.S. more than in Saudi Arabia. However, no participant in this case mentioned having more mobility freedom. Afnan said: "Sometimes in class they commented, 'Ohh, you don't drive in Saudi Arabia?' I would respond with, 'I get out in Saudi Arabia more than here in the U.S.'" (June 4, 2018). She explained that in Saudi Arabia, she had a driver and she had time to go out for shopping or visiting family members and friends. But while in the U.S., her husband was the only one who drove, and she was so busy as a graduate student and mother of three children that her mobility was limited.

Practicing self-care. Most of the participants missed the women’s only places or the hijab friendly environment of Saudi Arabia, such as beauty salons, spas, gyms, and swimming pools where they could nurture their own needs as women. Khawater explained, “I was struggling to find a private pool, gym, spa or beauty salon” (May 22, 2018). Because she is veiled, she could not find such places for women only in the United States.

Second Theme: Strategies of Success

To deal with the five challenges described above, Saudi participants were able to develop some strategies to succeed and achieve their educational goals in the host country. The data showed two important strategies of success these participants used: employing resiliency and developing intercultural competence. These two strategies will be explained in this section.

Resilience

Yeager and Dweck (2012) defined resilience as “any behavioral, attributional, or emotional response to an academic or social challenge that is positive and beneficial for development (such as seeking new strategies, putting forth greater effort, or solving conflicts peacefully)” (p. 303). Also, the American Psychological Association (n.d.) defined resilience as “bouncing back from difficult experiences” (para.1). Becoming resilient requires acquisition of several skills including: setting goals, developing self-confidence, and seeking support (American Psychological Association, n.d.; Wang, 2009). The data in this case showed the Saudi females were resilient and either possessed or acquired the skills described in the following sections.

Setting goals and moving toward them. The ability to set goals and take steps to achieve them was clear in the participants’ responses in this case. As mentioned when I

introduced the participants, all five participants shared one important goal, which was to obtain a graduate degree in order to become an English Language lecturer in order to move forward to spend their professional life in an academic career. Although the participants faced many challenges in their efforts to obtain graduate degrees, they were determined to achieve this goal by creating realistic plans, setting priorities, and managing their time.

Afnan mentioned that one of the strategies she used to become a successful student was developing “short-term and long-term plans (E)” (June 4, 2018). Noof also placed emphasis on the importance of “planning” (May 23, 2018). For example, she planned to delay having a baby until the last semester in her journey to remain focused on her goal. All five participants were effectively managing their time and setting priorities, especially since most of them had families, including children, that imposed additional responsibilities on them. Afnan and Shahad said they planned according to the syllabus for each course, so they could start working on their papers in advance to be able to have time to edit and obtain feedback before the submission deadline. Ibtihal and Khawater provided another example, stating they prepared meals in advance to save time: “I learned to prepare meals in advance and put them in the freezer” (Khawater, May 22, 2018). Limiting social life to weekends and staying up late to finish important tasks were other strategies some participants mentioned. Afnan shared, “The place where I did not get enough sleep was in the United States. I woke up before everyone, and I was the last one to go to bed to complete my work while the children were sleeping” (June 4, 2018).

Self-confidence. The participants in this case also demonstrated confidence in their own strengths and abilities. Ibtihal commented, “When I plan to do something, I do it” (May 22, 2018). Shahad echoed her comment by stating, “I have patience. If I want to achieve

something, I keep trying until I achieve it” (June 15, 2018). Noof also presented a positive view of herself in saying, “I believe that by remaining patient, we get what we want” (May 23, 2018).

Seeking support. Another important characteristic of resilience is the ability to seek and accept support from available resources. The Saudi participants in this case were able to obtain different forms of support: social support from the guardian/mahram and Saudi female friends; institutional support within the university environment from advisors, instructors, and their universities’ resources and services; and religious support from their faith.

The guardian/mahram. One of the strongest sources of support for my participants was the guardian or the mahram, usually a male relative such as the father, husband or brother. Four participants in this case shared their journeys with their husbands, and the fifth participant was with her brother. All the participants felt their companions were “supportive” and were a great source of emotional and physical support. Shahad stated:

Maybe in individualistic societies, they don’t understand the importance of mahram because they love to be independent. In contrast, we are a collective society; we are used to being together. When we need something, there is someone who can help. I can live by myself in the U.S. and be completely independent, but my mahram for me was a source of emotional support. My brother was very supportive. (June 15, 2018)

Another participant, Afnan, pointed out that her husband was a graduate student in a different English language related department and shared all family responsibilities with her. In addition, when he graduated and returned to Saudi Arabia, he supported her financially to pursue her Ph.D. in the U.S. when her sponsor refused to upgrade her scholarship. Afnan

explained: “My husband was very supportive. Without my husband and without his support, I would not be here. He supported me emotionally, financially and academically (E)” (June 4, 2018). Similarly, Khawater and Noof spoke positively about their husbands helping them in everything, especially with the babies’ responsibilities.

Saudi female friends. All the participants indicated that having Saudi female friends in the U.S. was a source of support, as they all shared the same culture and faced similar challenges. They created small Saudi communities where they could meet on Fridays or weekends. These communities provided them a space of freedom similar to what they would have in Saudi Arabia, where only women meet together wearing makeup, short dresses, or whatever they wanted (because there is no presence of men). According to most participants, some Saudi female friends were playing a role similar to the role of their extended family in Saudi Arabia, because these friends helped each other when one gave birth or needed babysitting to be able to attend a class. Khawater described her friends by saying, “They were supportive, they cooked for me when I gave birth, and they helped me with my baby” (May 22, 2018). Afnan added, “They were like my sisters, like my family (E)” (June 4, 2018). In addition, Ibtihal and Shahad reported they had Saudi female friends who were in the same major, which gave them an opportunity to help each other academically. Ibtihal stated, “We used to go to the library together and work as a group. We pushed each other and encouraged each other” (May 22, 2018).

Advisors and instructors. Within the academic context, advisors and instructors played a significant role in the participants’ experiences. On the one hand, the participants showed they were proactive by initiating a request for help from the instructor or advisor. Khawater stated, “I used to go to the instructors to ask about the assignments. I wanted to

know their expectations. I did not depend on the guidelines only” (May 22, 2018). Ibtihal likewise said, “I take advantage of the office hours. I am very keen on feedback” (May 22, 2018). On the other hand, all the participants in this case referred to their advisors and instructors as “supportive” in one way or another. Khawater described her relation with her advisor by saying, “He was very supportive, flexible, and caring. He knew I was very tired when I was pregnant, and he helped me a lot. I felt he was like my father” (May 22, 2018). Afnan also had a positive experience with her advisor. Although he was not always available for communication, she stated, “He was very flexible and supportive. He facilitated many things for me to have my master and get admission to the Ph.D. program (E)” (June 4, 2018). The only participant who reported a negative situation with her advisor was Shahad. Although she described her advisor as “friendly and flexible” (June 15, 2018), she mentioned that her advisor did not give her constructive feedback on her thesis until the last few days before her defense.

Regarding the instructors, I noticed when the participants described them, they made a comparison between their previous instructors in Saudi Arabia and instructors in the United States. For example, Noof commented, “They were more qualified than Saudi instructors and more cooperative” (May 23, 2018). Noof, like the other participants, explained that her U.S. instructors were using student-centered pedagogies that engaged students in critical thinking and active learning. In addition, the participants provided insight into the student-teacher relationship in both contexts. While in Saudi Arabia there is a hierarchical relation between students and instructors, in the U.S. students can have informal conversations with their advisor or instructor in Starbucks, as Khawater mentioned. Afnan stated, “There is no power relation when you talk to your advisor or professor, not like Saudi Arabia (E)” (June 4,

2018). Because of this horizontal relation, some participants described their instructors as being “friendly” and “flexible.” Except for Afnan who experienced discrimination from *some* of her instructors (not all of them), all the other four participants felt their instructors were “understanding” that they had different cultural norms and traditions and were second language learners.

University resources and services. All the participants reported they took advantage of university resources available in their host universities, especially services provided by the library (building and website) and writing center. In her intent letter required for seeking admission to the host university, Shahad described the educational environment she found when she arrived in the United States:

I find multimedia tools that would help me to accomplish my goals easily such as the libraries that are highly equipped with books and other media that facilitate the education process. I was touched by the high standards of the [*specific university*], how instructors interact with students and the positive environment that was created (E). (Document, June 11, 2018)

All five participants reported their libraries and writing centers were very “helpful.” The library building provided them with an effective academic environment where they could have a quiet place to study or meet friends to work in groups, in addition to other services such as printing and borrowing books. The electronic library was also very helpful for finding articles and references they needed for their academic papers. One of the participants stated she considered the library as her “second home (E)” (Afnan, June 4, 2018) in the United States. It was apparent the writing centers of their host universities played an important role in their educational experiences. Shahad stated, “The writing center was the

best resource for me, because I really benefitted from their help editing my papers” (June 15, 2018).

The final element in this section is the university’s orientation for new students. Most of the participants reported that the orientation they had at the beginning of their journey was helpful. Khawater stated, “The orientation was useful. I learned about the university resources and everything, such as how to use Blackboard. Also, they told us about the university rules and regulations” (May 22, 2018). Noof also mentioned, “It was very helpful they showed us the classrooms because the university was so big, and they informed us about the resources there” (May 23, 2018).

Religious faith. When I asked the participants about the greatest source of support they received to succeed in their journey, they all mentioned they sought help from God. Afnan stated, “We sought the help from Allah [*God*]....We got support from Allah” (June 4, 2018). Noof also explained, “Allah is the one who helped me continue my education with a supportive husband. Without Allah’s help, I would not accomplish what I have today” (May 23, 2018). Some participants shared that meditation and some spiritual practices, such as praying, reading Qur’an and/or going to the mosque, helped provide them strength. Ibtihad stated that whenever she became overwhelmed, she put her trust in Allah, and “prayed to relieve stress” (May 22, 2018). Afnan, Ibtihal, and Shahad mentioned going to the mosque was helpful for meeting the Muslim community and finding spirituality. Afnan said, “The mosque was an important place for me and my family. We belonged to the community there, and we celebrated Muslim holidays with them” (June 4, 2018). Shahad added, “I went to the mosque, where I found a sense of spirituality and contentment” (June 15, 2018). These three behaviors: setting goals, developing self-confidence, and seeking support from various

resources, created strong, resilient Saudi females. In addition to becoming resilient, the participants developed *intercultural competence*, which is the second strategy they used to face the five challenges discussed previously.

Intercultural Competence

There is extensive research on intercultural competence from various theoretical and academic disciplines ranging from business to education (Deardorff, 2006; Rathje, 2007). However, intercultural competence can generally be defined as the ability to interact effectively in intercultural environments (Deardorff, 2006; Rathje, 2007). Developing intercultural competence was an important aspect of the ability of the Saudi female students in this case to succeed personally and academically in their cultural transition from Saudi Arabia to the United States. According to Deardorff (2006), there are many components of intercultural competence. Among these components, there are three important elements of intercultural competence that I found very obvious in the data: (a) positive attitude toward the host culture: having respect, being open, and having a sense of discovery to know the host culture; (b) cultural self-awareness (awareness of the one's own cultural identity); and (c) adaptability and flexibility. Based on my analysis of the data, I argue that the participants were able to develop all three of these elements of intercultural competence.

Having respect, being open and having a sense of discovery. All the participants expressed a positive attitude about being exposed to a different culture. For example, Shahad had never been outside Saudi Arabia. However, she said that although she had been admitted to a master's degree program in a local university in Saudi Arabia, she was "very excited" (June 15, 2018) about engaging in an educational experience abroad. One of her reasons was to learn about a new and different culture. Noof also expressed excitement about studying in

the U.S., especially because she had lived part of her childhood in the United States. She stated, “There was always a sense of desire inside me to go back to the US” (Document, June 3, 2018). Ibtihal also described her openness to studying in the U.S. even before she came here. She explained, “Before coming to the U.S., I read a lot about living there, to the extent that once I arrived, I felt nothing new. I did not feel any culture shock, although it was my first trip outside Saudi Arabia” (May 22, 2018). As with Ibtihal, no participant in this case experienced “culture shock” upon arriving in the United States. This finding matched Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern’s (2015) findings, who argued the majority of the Saudi female participants in their study did not experience culture shock.

Without exception, all participants in this case reported appreciation for the diversity of students in their American classrooms. Unlike Saudi classes that are almost homogeneous (mostly females, Saudis and Muslims speaking Arabic, and mostly the same age), Khawater said the first thing she noticed in her first graduate class in the U.S. was diversity: “I noticed the diversity among students in terms of age. I was surprised to see old students in their fifties. Also, there were students from different social classes and nationalities. I liked how they were so diverse” (May 22, 2018).

Despite Altamimi (2014), Caldwell (2013), and Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) arguments that some of their Saudi female participants limited their socialization to other Saudi women only or had difficulty making and maintaining friendships with American people, the participants of this study reported something quite different. Most of participants in this case acknowledged the importance of knowing people from different backgrounds and cultures. Similar to the Saudi female participants in Alsabatin’s (2015) study, the participants in this case felt solidarity with their Saudi female

friends as they had some commonalities, but they also developed friendships with some female American and international students. They believed that developing these different friendships was important for practicing the English language, learning about different cultures, and introducing their own culture to other people. Noof stated, “I have maintained excellent relationships with my teachers and classmates” (Document, June 3, 2018). In addition, Ibtihal found that “Americans were friendly” (May 22, 2018). She mentioned that as she developed friendly relationships with some of her female instructors and classmates, she began inviting them to her home along with other Saudi female friends. In fact, she is still in touch with some of them now. Furthermore, although Afnan mentioned that some of her classmates avoided talking or sitting by her, she was able to initiate conversations and develop a friendship relationship with some female “American friends from different ethnicities (E)” (June 4, 2018). The majority of the participants developed the ability to compare, analyze and evaluate different aspects, not only regarding educational systems, but also regarding the differences between their own culture and the host country. Afnan stated:

I had the chance to be exposed to the different cultures of Saudi Arabia and the United States. I did not learn from the stereotypes; I know my culture, and I have learned about their culture by living there for about nine years. (June 4, 2018)

When I asked Afnan about how much and how deeply she took the opportunity to understand the U.S. culture, she stated:

What I learned about the American society was a result of my contact with American people. As a student for many years in the U.S., I had the chance to contact many American people of different age groups. Also, as a mother, I

had an effective communication with my children's teachers. Actually, being a graduate student gave the chance to participate in class discussions about many issues in the American society. For example, I had a course on Native American culture that taught me a lot. Also, I developed friendship relationships with many American students and American instructors who invited me to their homes. In addition to all this, I had the chance to live in the university dorm for one year, which gave me the chance to have an extensive communication with American and international students in the dorm.

(February 12, 2019)

Living in the U.S. for a few years may not be enough to deeply understand the values and the many perspectives of a diverse society like the United States. For example, the data of this case did not show how deeply the participants were able to create meaningful American friendships and seek out cultural and religious experiences different from their own. For instance, no participant in this case mentioned that she visited a polling place to watch U.S. citizens vote or visited a Christian or Jewish worship service in order to try to understand its meaning to the persons who attend. However, the participants reported that they were open to learn about the different cultures in the U.S., and they reported their appreciation for the diversity they witnessed in American society, which transformed some of their views (as will be explained in the next section). Being open, respectful, and ready to effectively communicate with American people gave the participants a better understanding of the host culture (but not necessarily a deep understanding of all the various perspectives in this diverse society).

Unfortunately, I did not ask the participants about their attitudes toward the stereotypes some Saudis may have about American women—stereotypes that portray “American women as ethnocentric, superficial, individualistic and immoral” (Mishra, 2007, p. 259). However, no participant in this case portrayed American women in such ways. Instead, many participants stated that Americans are “friendly” and “kind.” On the other hand, because I asked the participants about the Western perception of Saudi women in the U.S., and how they reacted to these perceptions, the data I received showed how the participants were eager to clear up the misconceptions about Saudi and Muslim women, especially to counter all the negative stereotypes that they faced in the United States.

In addition, all the participants expressed positive attitudes toward the American educational culture that promotes active learning, critical thinking, research and discovery. Although they all expressed difficulty in adapting to American education, they generally felt it was more effective than Saudi education. Noof explained, “Studying in the U.S. was an interesting experience. It is all about conducting research and developing knowledge you can use in your everyday life” (May 23, 2018). Afnan also commented, “I liked working in groups, learning from each other and listening to others’ points of views” (June 4, 2018). In addition, the majority of the participants appreciated how education in the U.S. was systematic, and how instructors were organized and respected their appointments and office hours. Ibtihal stated, “Everything was systematic, and on time. There was a discipline. For example, when an instructor had office hours, he will be in his office on time. Everything was documented; everything was by emails” (May 22, 2018). Not only did the participants in this case express positive attitudes toward the host culture, its diversity and multicultural

education, but many Saudi females in the studies by Arafeh (2017), Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern (2015), and Sandekian et al. (2015) also voiced similar attitudes.

Cultural self-awareness. Living in the U.S. for more than two years not only helped the participants acquire a better understanding of the host country, but it also helped them gain greater awareness of their own cultural and religious identities. Shahad stated, “Living in the U.S. helped me discover myself in a deeper way” (June 15, 2018). The participants shared their own interpretation of their veil and their attitude toward the widespread perception of Saudi women in the United States.

When I asked the participants about the representation of Saudi women in the Western media, and how they would respond to those who argue that Saudi women are oppressed with no rights and freedom, I received similar responses. Ibtihal stated, “No, we are not [*oppressed*]. We have everything we need. To the contrary, we have a luxurious life in Saudi Arabia” (May 22, 2018). Noof echoed Ibtihal’s response:

Not at all; we are not oppressed. In contrast, whatever we want we can get...

Also, our men are not aggressive the way they are portrayed in Western media. We are served by the father, the husband or the brother. (May 23, 2018)

Shahad also stated, “This is a misconception. If I am oppressed, I would not have the chance to study in the United States. Thank God I have access to all my rights” (June 15, 2018).

Afnan added: “I am not oppressed. They [*some Americans*] look at this point from their perspective, not from our perspective. They don’t know enough about our culture and religion, so they look at some issues from their Western point of view (E)” (June 4, 2018).

As I have mentioned, all the participants were veiled in the host country. While the veil was compulsory in Saudi Arabia until 2017, it was a choice for the participants to wear it in the United States. All five participants expressed that the veil for them represented their religious identity, and they wore it as a religious duty. Khawater explained to an American woman who asked about the veil, “I cover it [*her hair*] because of my religion.” She added, “I choose to wear it. It is my choice” (May 22, 2018). Afnan also stated, “It represented my identity as a Muslim (E)” (June 4, 2018).

Considering the veil as part of their religious identity and gender segregation as another factor affecting their cultural identity, freedom for these women had its own interpretation. Afnan stated, “Freedom for me is to do and say what I want, to be able to make decisions that work for me and my family... I have the freedom to do what I want, especially in my country where the hijab is not an obstacle to my progress” (June 4, 2018). When I asked Shahad about having more freedom in the U.S., she responded, “No, I had my freedom before I came to the United States. Coming to the U.S. did not give me more freedom” (June 15, 2018). Khawater reflected, “In Saudi Arabia, I had more freedom than in the U.S. In Saudi Arabia, I feel more safe” (May 22, 2018). In addition to feeling safer as a Muslim veiled woman in Saudi Arabia, Khawater said she had access to many places such as beauty salons, gyms, and spas in Saudi Arabia, but not in the United States.

The final point to discuss in this section is the participants’ attitude toward the reforms that Saudi Arabia witnessed recently, such as: giving women the choice to wear the veil, allowing gender-mixed events in major cities, lifting the ban on female driving, eliminating the authority of the male guardian, and increasing women’s participation in the workforce. All the participants in this case generally agree on these reforms. Noof stated: “I

agree with the reforms; I feel they gave women more chances” (May 23, 2018). However, many participants expressed their concern about losing their cultural and Muslim identity. For example, Shahad discussed: “I agree with the reforms, but I have some concerns. I am afraid that these changes will encourage some individuals to act against our society’s traditions and customs. I like the reforms, but we still need more reforms” (June 15, 2018).

Afnan added:

I agree with the reforms as long as they are within the Islamic law. I agree with these recent reforms, especially those that give women active roles in the society. However, all these rights were already given to women by Islam. I think we still need more reforms. (June 4, 2018)

All the participants in this case agreed on making the veil optional and removing the guardian authority. They believed that wearing the veil is a choice and cannot be forced. Although all the participants in this case had supportive husbands/brothers, they agreed on eliminating the authority of the guardian because not all Saudi women have supportive male relatives.

Flexibility and adaptability. The third element of intercultural competence is flexibility and adaptability. Although these female students expressed a strong sense of Saudi and Muslim identity in the interviews, the participants showed flexibility in being able to live in the United States. Most of the participants needed to accommodate themselves to some of the U.S.'s cultural customs and practices while they were living and studying in the United States. For example, none of my participants wore a Saudi traditional black abaya (a loose over-garment that covers the whole body except the face and hands) in the United States. They wore modest colorful clothes or colored abayas. Also, Ibtihal stopped covering her face

when she felt it was an obstacle for her when communicating with others. Furthermore, while interacting with male classmates/students is the norm in American society, it is not acceptable in the Saudi culture to interact informally with non-relative males outside the classroom or outside the workplace. Therefore, Khawater, Noof, and Shahad reported that they needed to change some of their behaviors toward male students in American classrooms to be able to engage in the U.S. classrooms and also to show respect to the host culture. For example, Khawater said:

Most of my classmates were males. So, I had to exchange emails with them and meet them outside the classroom, in the library and coffee shops, to work together and finish some group projects. That was a little bit awkward for me; especially that I came from Al-Qasim which is, as you know, a very conservative city. Although I had a level of discomfort, I had to do this to respect the American culture. You know, working with male classmates is the norm in America. (February 10, 2019)

Noof also described a similar attitude:

In the last course I took in my master's degree, I had to teach some classes. Most of the students in these classes were males. So, I had to teach them and deal with them in a way that does not create any barriers or indicate any sense of discrimination. However, I kept the interaction with all students within the limits of the classroom and the course subject. Also, I did not shake hands with males. I had to keep the balance between respecting the norms of American classrooms and also respect my religion and values. (February 10, 2019)

Another example of the flexibility of the participants was when they faced many questions and comments indicating curiosity or stereotypes about Saudi women. They were able to deal with these situations by being flexible and using them as opportunities to clear up misconceptions. Afnan stated, “You are not only a student; you are an ambassador of your country. You have to correct these misunderstandings (E)” (June 4, 2018). This idea of being an ambassador or having a responsibility to correct misconceptions about Saudi and Muslim women was also reflected among Saudi females in the existing literature investigating Saudi women’s experiences abroad (Alsabatin, 2015; Heiberger, 2017; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Moursi, 2018).

Moreover, as the participants had many responsibilities as wives, mothers and graduate students, they developed the capacity to remain flexible. Khawater stated, “I was flexible; I coped with the change” (May 22, 2018). Afnan and Khawater also mentioned they stopped “being perfectionist.” Afnan added, “If I did not have time to cook, I could buy something to eat. If I could not iron the clothes, I can put them in the dryer. I can find alternatives for everything, but not for studying (E)” (June 4, 2018). The final element in this section is that all five Saudi females in this case reported the ability to adapt to a graduate level American educational system based on interactive learning and student-centered approaches.

By looking at the prior literature on Saudi students abroad, Shaw’s (2009) research mainly focused on the success strategies used by Saudi students (18 males and 7 females). When I compared my analysis to Shaw’s (2009), I found my participants to be very similar. They were resilient and possessed sufficient intercultural competence to deal with difficulties they encountered. In addition, Al-Sheikhly (2012) argued that her seven Saudi female

participants also developed intercultural competence and had strong levels of motivation to succeed. Similar to the strategies used by the participants in this case, practicing efficient time management strategies, setting goals, joining study groups, using campus resources, developing study skills, working hard, and remaining persistent were a few of the success strategies the Saudi students employed to ensure success in Alhajjuj (2016), Al-Sheikhly (2012) and Shaw's (2009) studies.

Third Theme: A Journey of Transformation

All the participants felt their experiences in the U.S. represented a *transformational journey*. The years they spent studying and living in the U.S. helped them grow personally and academically. Also, many cultural behaviors and attitudes of the participants were transformed because of their years in the United States. For example, the participants felt their experience abroad changed many aspects of their personalities. Ibtihal commented, "I saw a different culture. I learned, and my personality became more polished" (May 22, 2018). Carrying many responsibilities, all the participants felt their journey in the U.S. helped them to become "stronger, and more independent," especially the students who were parents and missed the support of their extended family and/or other social supports they received in their home country. Even Shahad, who was single, stated, "In the U.S., I had to do everything by myself. Although my brother helped me, but I depended more on myself. I became stronger and more independent" (June 15, 2018). Moreover, Afnan stated, "Obtaining a master's degree gave me more confidence to pursue a Ph.D." (June 4, 2018). She argued that her experience helped her create a much larger goal, as when she stated, "My goals now are not only to have another degree, but also to serve my community and my society (E)" (June 4, 2018).

Moreover, some participants reported that many of their behaviors have changed by living in the United States. For example, Ibtihal and Khawater discussed that living in the U.S. helped them to learn how to save money and live on a tight budget, especially because when they arrived in the U.S. they had a scholarship monthly allowance as the only source of income. In addition, Khawater explained that she valued how American people whom she met did not care about appearance. Khawater explained:

Unlike some people in Saudi Arabia who would care about brands and jewelry, most of people I met did not care about these shallow or superficial things. I saw professors in the U.S. wearing T-shirts from Walmart. The life in the U.S. was very simple. (February 10, 2019)

Further, Ibtihal discussed that living in the U.S. helped her to learn how to set boundaries in relationships with people. She discussed that before going to the U.S., she had not been able to say “no” or refuse any request from friends or relatives, even if that was at the expense of herself and her family. However, after living in the U.S. for years, Ibtihal stated: “I have learned how to say ‘no,’ and set boundaries in any relationship” (February 10, 2019).

In addition, being exposed to U.S. diversity and multicultural education helped the participants to get “more acceptance of the other” (Shahad, June 15, 2018). Noof reflected, “I have become more open to diversity” (May 23, 2018). Afnan added:

In the past, there was a radical discourse in Saudi Arabia by many extremists who strongly criticized the West and anything from the West. But by living there [*in the U.S.*] and interacting with people, many of my views changed. For example, during the presidential election in 2016, I saw how many Christian and Jewish people were defending Muslims who were prevented

from entering America. I have learned that humanity and religious tolerance are above many considerations. (February 12, 2019)

Academically, all the participants indicated that after obtaining their master's degrees in the U.S., their English language improved and they gained knowledge in their fields of study. Currently, all the participants are lecturers at Saudi universities. They all shared that they are applying what they learned from their experience in their host country, including "the method of teaching that emphasizes interactive, collaborative, and practical approaches to working with English language learners (E)" (Noof's document, June 3, 2018). After her educational experience in the U.S., Noof stated, "I developed a different view about my relations with my students" (May 23, 2018). She explained that she has established a horizontal relationship with her current students, instead of the hierarchical teacher-student relationships characteristic of most Saudi universities. Furthermore, Afnan said she now encourages her students to become critical thinkers and respect the diversity of students in their classrooms:

I teach my students to accept each other, even if they were from different tribes or following different sects of Islam. I encourage them not to take everything for granted and to question the written text and discourse in general. (June 4, 2018)

This concept of transformation was also discussed in Macias's (2016) study that examined the experiences of Saudi female students in an American university. Her participants also reported they had changed during their educational experiences, had developed more self-confidence and motivation, and planned to become change agents in their local communities. Also, Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) argued that

Saudi female participants in their study enjoyed diversity, grew intellectually, became more independent, and developed more self-confidence and freedom. However, the participants in this case did not report having more freedom in the United States. Most of the Saudi women who adjusted successfully in Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern's (2015) study came from modernized regions of Saudi Arabia. The participants in this case came from both modernized and more conservative cities, and they all reported adjusting to life in the U.S. and developing positive attitudes in general despite the challenges they faced.

Conclusion

This chapter reported the findings of the first case that examined the educational experiences of Saudi females who graduated from American universities with a master's degree in an English-related field (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education (CLDE), TESOL, Applied Linguistics, Linguistics, ESOL). The chapter started with a detailed description of the five participants, and then it discussed three major themes that arose from the data. The three themes included: challenges on the journey, strategies for success, and a journey of transformation. The next chapter reports the findings of the second case that examined the educational experiences of Saudi females who graduated with master's degrees in English-related fields from Saudi universities.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: SECOND CASE (THE EXPERIENCES OF SAUDI FEMALES WHO GRADUATED FROM SAUDI UNIVERSITIES)

This chapter presents the findings of the second case of the study, which examines the experiences of five Saudi females who graduated with a master's degree in an English language related field from Saudi universities. To help the reader have a contextualized understanding of the findings of the case, the chapter begins with a description of the research participants in this case, and then it presents five major themes that emerged from the data.

Participants' Description

The five participants in this second case all have a master's degree in an English language related field from three different Saudi universities. They all spent from two to four years achieving a master's degree. All five participants mentioned that they wanted to pursue higher education to have an academic job at a Saudi university. Also, all of them were exposed to English language education in Saudi public schools starting in middle school. However, two participants were exposed to English at home by their fathers who were fluent in English. The participants' ages range between 32 to 35 years old, and most of them are married and have children. All the participants in this case identified themselves as middle-class women, and all of them are Sunni Muslims. In addition, four of the participants are veiled (wear hijab inside and outside their home country). Table 5.1. provides more description of the participants (the description of the participants when they were interviewed). To protect the participants' privacy, I used pseudonyms (see).

Table 5.1.

Description of the Participants in this Case

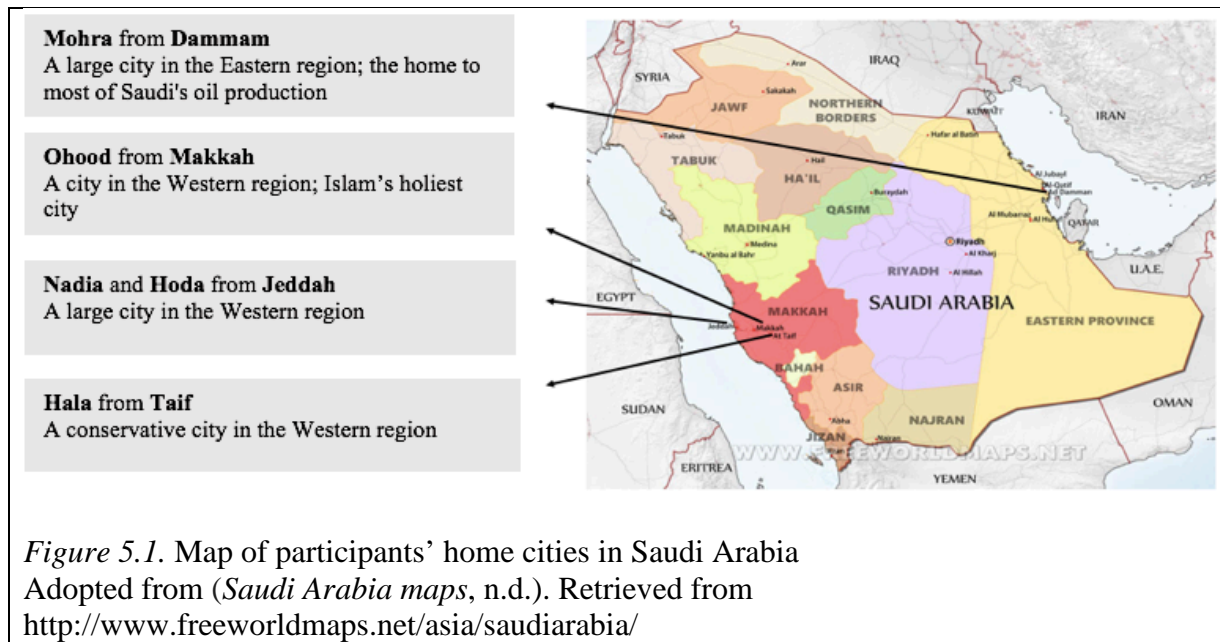
Name of the Participant	Home City	Marital Status and Children	MA Major	University Location in Saudi Arabia	Year of Graduation	Length of Time to Finish the Master's Degree
Nadia	Jeddah	Married Five children	Linguistics	University in Makkah	2013	Four years
Mohra	Dammam	Divorced Two children	Translation	University in Riyadh	2015	Two years
Hala	Taif	Married Two children	Linguistics	University in Taif	2016	Four years
Hoda	Jeddah	Married Four children	Linguistics	University in Taif	2018	Four years
Ohood	Makkah	Married Three Children	Linguistics	University in Taif	2018	Three years

Participants' Home Cities in Saudi Arabia and Host Universities in Saudi Arabia

In this section, I briefly describe the participants' home cities. Then I present the three universities in Saudi Arabia from where the participants obtained their master's degrees. After this description, I introduce the participants in this case.

Participants' home cities in Saudi Arabia. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Saudi Arabian cities are different from each other in terms of being more modern or more conservative. Most of the participants in this case (four out of five) are from modernized large cities (Jeddah, Dammam, and Makkah) where rules of gender segregation, wearing traditional black abaya, and covering the face are more flexible. Women can have job opportunities in mixed workplaces, and it is up to them to cover the face and wear the

traditional abaya. Makkah is the birthplace of Islam and the home of the holy mosque that attracts Muslims from all over the world. As a result, it is the most diverse city in Saudi Arabia where women wear different forms of hijab, and gender segregation is more flexible in public places. On the other hand, Taif is one of the conservative cities where wearing the black abaya and covering the face is the norm, and employment opportunities in mixed or Western companies are fewer (see Figure 5.1.).

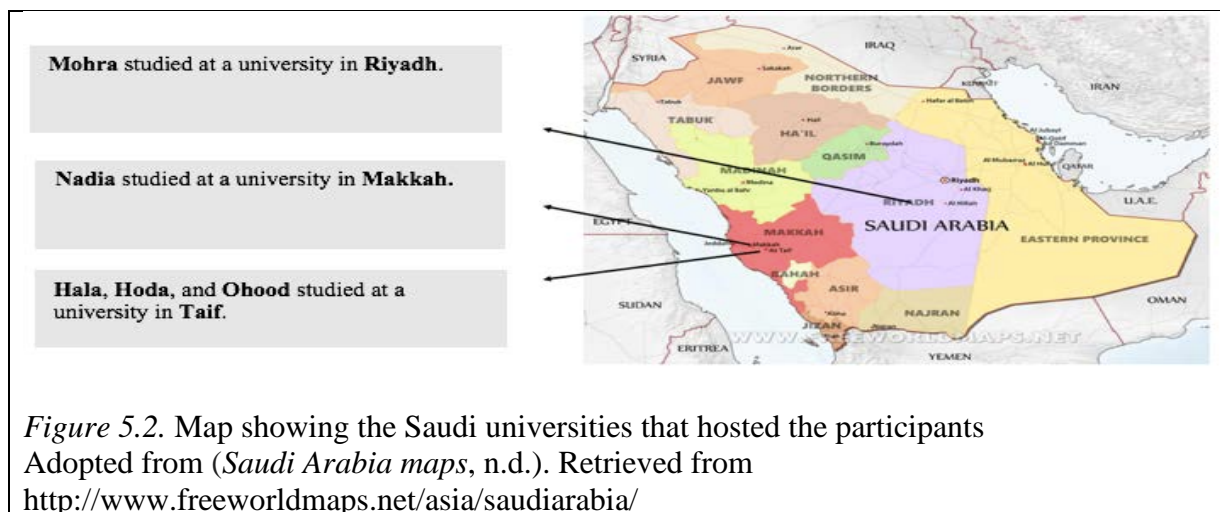


Host universities in Saudi Arabia. The five participants had master's degrees from three different Saudi universities in different cities (Figure 5.2. shows the locations of these universities). Public education in Saudi Arabia is free. So, the five participants received free graduate education, and in addition, as graduate students, they received a monthly allowance.

Similar to the U.S., the master's programs in these three Saudi universities were based on three semesters of coursework and one semester for the thesis. Therefore, students can earn their master's degree in two years. Yet students can have up to five semesters to

complete the thesis. However, unlike U.S. universities, these Saudi universities offered one fixed plan in which the students didn't have a choice between working on a thesis or taking a comprehensive exam; all students were expected to submit a thesis to graduate. Also, students had to take nine credits each semester, and there were no elective courses; they had to take the courses required in their plans. Also, unlike U.S. universities that give the students the chance to have an academic advisor from the very beginning of their master's program, these participants had to choose, and some of them were assigned, an academic advisor after finishing their coursework.

To meet admission requirements at U.S. universities (as mentioned in the first case in Chapter 4), most of students had to pass the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or pass specific levels in a pre-English program, and/or provide a letter of intent. In the Saudi universities, all students had to pass a written linguistics test by the university department, and/or an English proficiency test, called Standardized Test for English Proficiency (STEP). Only one participant was required to pass the IELTS. In addition to these two tests, some participants also had to pass Qiyas (similar to the GRE in the U.S.) and complete an interview.



Description of Each Participant

Nadia. Nadia is 35 years old and from Jeddah. Her parents had high school diplomas. Nadia had no exposure to English before enrolling to Saudi public schools. When Nadia finished high school, she got married and had five children. After earning her Bachelor's degree in English Language, Nadia became a TA at a Saudi university, which sponsored her to pursue her Master's degree in Linguistics. Nadia only had to pass a linguistics test by the Department of Linguistics and attend an interview to be admitted to the master's program. After four years of studying, Nadia was awarded her degree in 2013 from a university in Makkah. Nadia wanted to pursue a master's degree abroad in an English-speaking country, but because she had a large family, she preferred to study in a local Saudi university. Nadia shared that her goal of pursuing a master's degree was to secure an academic position at a Saudi university. She stated: "I had an academic ambition since I was an undergraduate student. I wanted to have a master's degree and a Ph.D. to work in the academic field" (July 17, 2018). Currently, Nadia is a lecturer at a Saudi university.

Mohra. Mohra is 35 years old and from Dammam. Her family is highly educated; her father earned a Ph.D. abroad, and her sisters have graduate degrees. However, her mother finished her middle school only. Mohra's exposure to English was not only limited to English classes at school; she was exposed to English language at home where she spoke English with her father and sisters. Also, Mohra had a Bachelor's degree in English Literature. After her graduation, she worked in some administrative jobs in different companies in Dammam (mixed-gender companies). When Mohra got married, she moved to Riyadh and had two children. However, according to Mohra: "I had some major changes in my life; I got divorced. So things went another way (E)" (June 6, 2018). Mohra decided to

pursue her graduate studies. Because of her familial circumstances, Mohra could not study abroad. Therefore, she applied for a Master's degree in Translation in Riyadh. To be admitted to the master's degree program, Mohra had to pass a written linguistics test and the Qiyas test (a requirement of graduate programs in some Saudi universities, similar to the GRE in the U.S.).

Pursuing a graduate degree for Mohra, after getting a divorce, was a chance for her to start a new experience. When I asked Mohra about her goal of pursuing a master's degree, she answered: "I was wondering, in that time of my life, what to do. My life was going through a low phase. So I thought: 'I want anything to keep me occupied' (E)" (June 6, 2018). Although Mohra had a full-time job as an English teacher in an elementary school, she stated: "I had a nanny. She helped me with the kids ...I had plenty of time (E)" (June 6, 2018). Unlike other participants in this study, Mohra did not have a supportive guardian/mahram during her master's degree in Riyadh because she was divorced, and her father and brothers all lived in Dammam. For Mohra, as well as for other participants in this study, having a graduate degree could help her have an academic career at a university, which she aspired to for a long time. Currently, Mohra is a lecturer at a Saudi university, and she is trying to get admitted to a Ph.D. program in the same major.

Hala. Hala is 32 years old and from Taif. She is married and a mother of two girls. Hala's mother had a high school diploma while her father had a two-year diploma, and he worked in a British aerospace company in Saudi Arabia. Because of his work, Hala stated: "My father traveled a lot to Britain and the U.S., and he was fluent in English. But he did not speak it with us" (February 12, 2019). Therefore, Hala's exposure to English started in middle school. Hala has a Bachelor's degree in English Language. When I asked Hala about

how she decided to pursue a master's degree, she stated: "I wanted to pursue a master's degree for a long time. When I heard about an opening at a master's program at the university in my city, I immediately applied" (August 1, 2018). There was no master's program related to English in Hala's home city. So, when a master's program in linguistics was opened for the first time in her city, Hala was one of the first students to apply. Hala graduated in 2016, after spending four years in the program. To be admitted, Hala had to pass two tests: a written linguistics test, and STEP. The STEP is similar to the IELTS and TOEFL tests in the U.S., but, according to the participants, it is easier.

Hala shared her goal of pursuing a graduate degree: "I love studying and learning. It is not only about having a job; I love to develop myself. I can't stay home doing nothing and having no goals" (August 1, 2018). In 2017, Hala and her husband received a scholarship to study in Canada. However, when Hala applied for a Ph.D. program at a university in Canada, she was told that her master's degree did not qualify her to pursue a Ph.D. at that university. Then, after a diplomatic dispute between Saudi Arabia and Canada, Hala moved to the U.S. with her husband and children. Currently, Hala's husband is a Ph.D. student at a U.S. university while she is looking for an admission to start her Ph.D. in the U.S., too.

Hoda. Hoda is 35 years old and from Jeddah. She is married and has four children. When I asked Hoda about her family educational background and English exposure at home, she answered:

My mother quit university because she had to go to the USA with my father...my father was sent there by Saudi Airlines to study to be plane engines technician [*technician*] or something like that....a diploma I think, certainly not BA. My father spoke English but not at home, and my mother knew few

sentences.... I was born here in Saudi Arabia, never been to the USA (E).

(February 12, 2019)

Thus, Hoda started to learn English as a second language in Saudi public schools. After earning a Bachelor's degree in English Language, Hoda became a TA at a Saudi university, which sponsored her to work toward a Master's degree in Linguistics at a university in Taif. Hoda had to pass a linguistics test, STEP, Qiyas, and an interview to be admitted. After four years, she graduated in 2018. Hoda, like the other participants in this case, expressed that she preferred to study abroad. When I asked her about why she would prefer studying abroad, she stated: "I don't think that anyone who had a bachelor's degree in the English language wouldn't wish to study MA abroad for two reasons: first to improve her language and second to be exposed to a better education" (June 9, 2018). However, because Hoda had a large family, she preferred to pursue her graduate degree in Saudi Arabia. Hoda explained her goal of pursuing a graduate degree: "I wanted to open for myself more job opportunities by having a masters' degree. I wanted to have a position higher than a TA" (June 9, 2018). Currently, Hoda is a lecturer at a Saudi university.

Ohood. Ohood is 35 years old and from Makkah. She is married and a mother of three children. She moved to Taif when she got married, and she has been an English high school teacher there for five years. Ohood decided to pursue a Master's degree in Linguistics at a university in Taif (the same university that hosted Hala and Hoda). To gain admission, Ohood had to pass a linguistics test and the IELTS. She graduated in 2018 after spending three years in the program. Ohood worked fulltime as a teacher in the morning and attended classes in the evening. She shared that she wanted to pursue a graduate degree so that she could work at a university. She also said that the job itself was not a primary goal, as she

already had a job before earning a master’s degree. She stated: “I love knowledge and learning languages. I started to learn English when I was six years old, and I am now learning Spanish. I love learning languages. It is a passion (E)” (July 4, 2018). According to Ohood, she got that passion from her father who is a multilingual speaker and who helped her to be fluent in English as a child (she attended Saudi public school where English education isn’t introduced until the age of 13). By having a Master’s degree in Linguistics, Ohood believed that the English language can help promote an intellectual network in which Saudi and other international researchers can learn from each other. Ohood stated: “English language can help me as a Saudi researcher to publish my research about Saudi dialects so it can be read by other international linguists abroad (E)” (July 4, 2018). Finally, Ohood and Mohra are the only two participants in this case who chose to be interviewed in English. However, the two interviews were full of code-switching between Arabic and English.

Findings and Discussion

Five major themes emerged from analyzing the data. These themes are: challenges on the journey, strategies for success, hope is not yet lost, cultural self-awareness, and a journey of transformation. Table 5.2. summarizes these major themes:

Table 5.2.

The Major Themes of the Second Case: (Saudi Females Who Graduated from Saudi Universities)

First Theme: Challenges on the journey	Academic	1. English language 2. Writing a thesis 3. The transition from bachelor’s degree to master’s degree 4. Academic advising 5. Lack of institutional support
	Social	6. Balancing motherhood, and education

<p>Second Theme: Strategies for success</p>	<p>Being resilient</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting goals and moving toward them (making realistic plans, setting priorities, and time management) • Self-confidence • Self- directed learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Husband ○ Extended family ○ Friends ○ female maids ○ Advisors and instructor ○ Religious faith
<p>Third Theme: Hope is not yet lost</p>	<p>Comparing the educational experiences of three participants who graduated from the same university showed that their Saudi English graduate program was improving and growing.</p>
<p>Fourth Theme: Cultural self-awareness</p>	<p>The participants discussed their attitudes toward the perception of Saudi women in Western countries, and their interpretations of veil and gender segregation.</p>
<p>Fifth Theme: A journey of transformation</p>	<p>Personal transformation Academic transformation</p>

First Theme: Challenges on the Journey

Pursuing a graduate degree in a major related to English language in Saudi universities was a journey of overcoming challenges. The participants' responses presented six challenges that most of the participants had to face. Most of these challenges are academic, including: (1) English language; (2) the transition from bachelor's degree to the master's degree; (3) writing a thesis; (4) academic advising; (5) lack of institutional support. The last challenge is a social one: (6) balancing motherhood and education.

Challenge 1: English Language

As mentioned in the first case, there is a lack of exposure to the English language in Saudis' social lives and daily activities because of the dominance of the Arabic language. Exposure to the English language in Saudi Arabia is limited to English classes at schools. Similar to the first case, all five participants in this case were enrolled in Saudi public schools

where they started their English education in middle school. However, two participants, Ohood and Mohra, were exposed to English at home because their fathers spoke English with them. Table 5.3. shows the participants' family educational background and exposure to English at home and school before they started their master's degree.

Table 5.3.

Participants' Family Educational Background and Exposure to English at Home and School Before They Started Their Master's Degree

Name of the Participant	Family Educational Background	Exposure to English at Home	Experience with English Education
Nadia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Her parents had high school diplomas. 	_____	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Public school English classes -BA in English Language
Mohra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Her father had a Ph.D. from abroad. ○ Her mother finished middle school. 	She spoke English with her father and sisters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Public school English classes -BA in English Literature
Hala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Her father had a two-year diploma. He was fluent in English, but he did not use it with his children. ○ Her mother had a high school diploma. 	_____	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Public school English classes -BA in English Language
Hoda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Her father had a diploma from the U.S. He spoke English, but he did not use English at home with his children. ○ Her mother quit university (she had a high school diploma). 	_____	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Public school English classes -BA in English Language
Ohood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Her father was multilingual; he spoke English, French and Arabic. ○ Her mother finished middle school. 	She spoke English with her father.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Public school English classes -BA in English Language

When I asked Mohra about how she was able to improve her English and speak fluently although she was enrolled in a public school, she responded: “I had it [*English language*] in me a long time ago. I don't remember that I worked hard to learn it” (June 6, 2018). Then, Mohra explained that her father, who was educated abroad, helped her and her sisters speak English at home. She stated: “My father encouraged us to speak English at home. So, my sisters and I are all fluent in English. Also, my kids are already fluent in English, and they are learning French now (E)” (June 6, 2018). In addition, Mohra

mentioned: “I was born in the Easter region, we used to go to Aramco’s facilities there” (June 6, 2018). Mohra’s father was an employee in Saudi Aramco (a Saudi Arabian oil company, one of the largest oil companies in the world, and its employees have access to many facilities and services). This gave her exposure to English at the Aramco facilities. Similarly, Ohood shared that her father was a multilingual speaker who has had a big influence on her English and her love of learning and discovering languages.

Nevertheless, not all the participants in this case had similar opportunities of being exposed to English. Nadia, Hala, and Hoda all reported that having proficiency in English was a challenge they had to overcome. Although they all had a bachelor’s degree in English, it did not help them have English proficiency, especially communicative English skills. According to all five participants, during the four years of the bachelor’s program, they were exposed to specialized courses in their majors that had nothing to do with improving communicative skills in English. Nadia commented: “There was no chance for practicing the language even in our classes at the university” (July 17, 2018). In addition to being exposed to traditional ways of lecturing that made them passive learners, they had no chance to be exposed to English outside the classroom or in their social life, as Arabic is the dominant language in Saudi Arabia.

Unlike the participants in the first case who spent a long time trying to pass the IELTS test to get admitted to an American university, only Ohood was required to pass this test to get admitted to a Saudi university. Other participants had to pass STEP, which is also an English proficiency test, but they all declared that it was easy to pass. To get admitted, all they had to do was review some basic concepts in linguistics to get high score on a linguistics exam.

The difficulty that Nadia, Hala, and Hoda had was to improve their English proficiency because it would be the language that they would use in their career. In contrast to the participants in the first case who had the opportunity to interact with native speakers in the United States, these Saudi females had to create their own way to improve their English within the context of Saudi Arabia. Nadia explained the ways she used to improve her English: “I was watching English movies and using the Internet to find English expressions to know how to pronounce some words or when to say them” (July 17, 2018). Hoda added: “Reading, watching make-up tutorials in English, and most of the things I used to watch were in English” (June 9, 2018). In addition, Hoda and Nadia mentioned that teaching English gave them the chance to practice the language with their students and colleagues. Nadia said: “Teaching gave me a chance to improve my English” (July 17, 2018).

Moreover, living in a big modernized city versus living in a small city influenced the improvement of four of the five participants’ English. Similar to Mohra who had the advantage of the Aramco facilities in the Eastern region, Nadia, who lived in Jeddah, mentioned that she took some English classes at English institutions there, which helped her improve her English. These big modernized cities in Saudi Arabia have many advanced English institutions that employ native speakers of English. On the other hand, these opportunities for enrollment in such English institutions were not available to Hala, who lived in Taif (a conservative city).

It is not surprising that having a proficiency in the English language was the first academic obstacle that the participants (in both the first and second cases) had to face, even though their undergraduate major was related to learning English. As mentioned in the literature review in Chapter 2, English language education in Saudi Arabia has been heavily

criticized by many scholars (Ababneh, 2016; Ahmad, 2015; Alrabai, 2016; Al-Nasser, 2015; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Al-Seghayer, 2015a; Balla, 2017; Ha & Barnawi, 2015). Some of the factors that resulted in low English proficiency among Saudi students, including the participants in this study, consisted of: not introducing English language education in public schools until middle school when students are about 13 years old; the lack of exposure to the English language beyond the classroom; and the teacher-centered approach in English classrooms that depended on students memorizing vocabulary and passing exams and that limited their chances to develop their communicative skills (Alrabai, 2016). (Chapter 2 discussed additional factors that influenced English education in Saudi Arabia.) Alrabai (2016) argued that even many Saudi undergraduates majoring in English have less than proficient English skills. Some of these students graduate with high GPAs, but they can't pass job placement tests because of their low English competence. To make matters worse, many scholars have discussed that a number of Saudi English language teachers are "linguistically and professionally incompetent" (Al-Seghayer, 2014, p. 21). I would further argue that having a master's degree in the English language from a Saudi university can't always guarantee proficiency in English. For example, Hala shared:

I don't think that my MA improved my English communicative skills. I may have learned academic terminology in linguistics from reading academic articles, but this did not improve my English as a language that I can use everyday. You know, there are no chances for practicing the language, neither in class nor outside the class. (August 1, 2018)

Hala, like other participants in this second case, shared that her master's program implemented traditional rote learning that was based on memorizing and passing exams. This

affected their English proficiency (this point will be explained in more details in the next section).

The last point to discuss in this section is the participants' attitude toward teaching their children the English language. Most of the participants in this case were aware of the importance of teaching their children English (the language of technology and globalization) in early stages, so their children would not struggle to acquire English as they grow up. At the same time, all the participants mentioned the importance of the Arabic language (standard Arabic). They were careful that learning English would not affect their children's acquisition of Arabic. For example, Mohra mentioned that children have the ability to acquire more than one language in early stages. Mohra and Ohood shared that they enrolled their children in private schools to learn English in the first grade, while Hala and Hoda depended on themselves to teach their children the English language at home. On the other hand, Nadia, indicated that she did not teach her children English until they started to be exposed to English language education in their Saudi public school. (Currently, English is introduced to students in the fourth grade.) According to Nadia, she wanted to give her children the choice and let them decide if they would like to be fluent English speakers or not.

Challenge 2: Writing a Thesis

While the participants in the first case who graduated from U.S. universities had the chance to choose writing a thesis as part of their plan or passing a comprehensive exam, the participants in this case all had to write a thesis to graduate. The two participants in the first case who wrote a thesis in their U.S. master's program did not report facing a big challenge or being unprepared for this step. In contrast, the majority of the participants in this case

(three out of five) shared that writing the thesis was very challenging for two main reasons: traditional rote learning in their master's program, and lack of effective coursework.

Traditional rote learning. As mentioned earlier in the literature review and in the first case, higher education in Saudi Arabia is based on teacher-centered approaches that depend on lecturing and passing exams. Three participants reported that their master's degree was a continuation of their bachelor's degree in terms of being exposed to the same learning and teaching pedagogies—ones that were based on teacher-centered approaches in which the instructor depended on lecturing and students had to memorize information and pass exams. There was little emphasis on creativity and on developing research and critical thinking skills. Hala stated:

Our education did not encourage us to read, search, draw a conclusion, share an opinion, or critique. Instead, you had to memorize and pass exams. Not only in the bachelor's degree, but also in our MA program we had to follow the same system...I just remember having one instructor who assigned us some books to read and summarize. In the class, he asked us to read our summaries, and then he gave us some papers to memorize and said the exam will include this and that part. In short, if you are not good at memorizing, you can't pass the MA courses. (August 1, 2018)

Nadia echoed a similar opinion: "Almost there was no difference between the bachelor's degree and the master's program. There was no creativity and no improving students research skills" (July 17, 2018). Mohra and Hala added that they did have the chance to be active learners by having group discussions or group projects in their classrooms. Most of the participants were not required to do presentations nor did they have

the chance to stand up in front of an audience and be asked questions for discussion, which could help these graduate students be ready for defending their thesis. Mohra commented: “The presentations were not mandatory and were not graded. We used to do very short and unprofessional presentations ...they did not encourage us; they did not prepare us to discuss or defend our thesis” (June 6, 2018).

Lack of effective coursework. Most of the participants in this case reported that the coursework of their master’s program depended on specialized subjects that helped them build their theoretical foundation. However, they reported that they only had one research course in the last semester of the program. This research course was supposed to prepare these graduate students to conduct research and to write a proposal and thesis. According to one participant, having only one research course was not enough to learn about the practical aspects of conducting research and writing a thesis. What made the situation worse was that this research course was not taught in a way that helped students design their research and write their proposal. Hala explained that in this research course, she had to write a small proposal and pass an exam. She stated:

The instructor explained what the literature review is, what APA and MLA are in the class, then we had the exam in which we had to write the definition of the literature review that I had already memorized. But there was no implementation. (August 1, 2018)

Hala described that she was introduced to all the basic skills of writing a research paper, such as writing a literature review and citing sources, but she was not given the chance to write a research paper and given feedback. All she had to do was write the definitions of these terms in the exam. When she had to submit a mini proposal that was required for that course, she

shared: “I read a lot of research proposals from the Internet until I found a good proposal that I tried to imitate” (August 1, 2018). However, after submitting the proposal, Hala had no feedback from the instructor. Similarly, Nadia shared:

There was one course about research skills. It was not very helpful because the instructor did not teach us how to implement or practice the research. We had an exam and we had to submit a mini proposal. However, he did not give me feedback. I did not know if what I wrote was right or wrong. (July 17, 2018)

Many students in this case indicated that they were not given feedback after submitting the final exam or the final proposal paper. The most important thing was submitting the required assignment; students would see their grades but with no feedback that could help them to grow academically.

As a result of this traditional rote learning and the lack of effective research coursework, Hala, Mohra, and Nadia all shared that they had a hard time writing their thesis because they were not prepared for this last step in their graduate journey. Nadia stated: “I learned how to conduct research just when I started working on my thesis” (July 17, 2018). Hala described herself when she started writing her thesis: “I was frightened and overwhelmed. I did not know from where I can start” (August 1, 2018). In addition, Mohra mentioned that writing a thesis was not easy, like answering essay questions on an exam. She stated: “It was very hard because it should be scientific and structured” (June 6, 2018).

Al-Seghayer (2015b) argued that the current Saudi system of education emphasizes “rote learning at the expense of teaching problem-solving, critical thinking, and cognitive skills, as well as technical skills, language proficiency, and better ways to adapt to global

changes” (p. 9). As a result of this system, students in higher education “lack the ability to analyze and think critically” (Al-Seghayer, 2015b, p. 23). Similarly, the students from this case were not prepared to carry out research and write a thesis. This challenge was also reported in prior literature. For example, Alzoman and Alarifi’s (2016) study examined difficulties that 148 Saudi female graduate students faced in a Saudi university. The study discussed that teaching coursework by using traditional lecturing was one of the difficulties that the graduate students reported. In addition, Abo Alola’s study (2015) examined the challenges that 99 Saudi female students in a Saudi master’s program experienced. This study reported that some of the difficulties that these Saudi graduates encountered included: traditional teacher-centric approaches that focused on lecturing, memorizing information as a learning strategy for most courses, and exams as the only way of assessment. However, these studies did not directly report the lack of research coursework to help students learn the practical aspects of conducting research and writing the thesis. All the previous studies reported that there was repetition in courses that teach theoretical aspects of the specialized subjects.

Challenge 3: The Transition from Bachelor’s Degree to Master’s Degree

While three participants in this case reported that their master’s programs continued to implement teacher-centered approaches, the two other participants, Hoda and Ohood, were exposed to more student-centered approaches. The reason for this change in teaching strategies was that the master’s program that Hoda and Ohood enrolled in witnessed many improvements. For example, the program had a new Vice Dean and many newly employed young Saudi faculty members who graduated from British and Australian universities.

Hoda and Ohood shared that they had difficulty in their transition from their bachelor's degree program to their master's degree program, which promoted more active learning. These two participants discussed that their bachelor's degree did not prepare them to pursue a master's degree, which depended on writing papers, presenting, discussing, thinking critically, and conducting research. Ohood commented: "It was difficult. I struggled a lot until I got used to the master's program (E)" (July 4, 2018). Hoda further explained:

The switch from the BA to MA was painful in the beginning. Instead of just waiting for the teacher to tell me what to memorize, I had to depend on myself to search for information, which was not easy in the beginning. When the instructor gave us an assignment, I spent a long time thinking what exactly he wants me to write. I only overcame this problem and started writing when I freed myself from thinking of what the instructor wants or does not want.

(June 9, 2018)

Although these two participants had to adapt to this transition, both Hoda and Ohood shared that they enjoyed being active learners who had a role in their educational experience. Also, both of them were the only two participants who did not report having difficulty conducting and writing their research for their master's thesis. On the other hand, the other three participants in this case did not report having difficulty in their transition from their undergraduate to graduate programs because their master's programs were implementing the same teaching and learning pedagogies they had in their undergraduate studies. As a result, these three participants had to face a big challenge in writing their theses.

Challenge 4: Academic Advising

The fourth challenge that most of the participants in this case (three out of five) had to face is related to academic advising. While the participants in the first case reported that their academic advisors were very supportive and played an important role in their academic success, many of the Saudi females who studied in Saudi universities reported having issues with academic advising at different stages in their educational journeys. This is illustrated in the following points: getting an academic advisor only after finishing coursework, shortage of academic advisors, and ineffective communication.

Getting an academic advisor only after finishing coursework. All the Saudi participants in this case identified an academic advisor only after finishing their coursework. According to their master's programs, after finishing the coursework, first, the graduate student was expected to choose the topic of her thesis and write a rough draft of the proposal. Second, the student had to contact the advisor that she wanted and get an approval from him/her to be her academic advisor. Third, the student had to submit her proposal and the name of her academic advisor to the department. The department would get an approval from the graduate office and inform the graduate student that her proposal was accepted and that she could start working on her research thesis. This procedure of delaying identifying an advisor until coursework was finished and the proposal was drafted was challenging for most students. Hoda stated: "I would have preferred to have an advisor who guides me from the beginning of my journey" (June 9, 2018). These students, who lacked the basic knowledge of designing a research study, found themselves without a mentor as they struggled with how to choose a research topic, how to narrow down their research questions, and, more importantly, how to write a good research proposal.

In addition, not all the participants had a chance to choose the academic advisor whom they wanted to work with. Hala and Nadia had to submit their proposals to their departments, and the department assigned them academic advisors. Having no chance to choose the academic advisor imposed a difficulty on Hala and Nadia because their advisors had different research interests. Nadia stated: “Having a good advisor was a matter of luck.” She explained:

We did not have the chance to choose an advisor. The department assigned us advisors, and that was not based on our research preferences. My advisor’s research interest was in phonology and I was not interested in phonology. My focus was on sociolinguistics. As a result, I had to change my research interest and do research in phonology. (July 17, 2018)

Hala added: “When I finished my coursework, I submitted the proposal to the department, and they had to assign me an advisor. I waited for a whole semester until they assigned me an advisor” (August 1, 2018).

Shortage of academic advisors. When I asked Nadia why she did not change the advisor instead of changing her research interest, and also when I asked Hala why she had to wait for a whole semester to get an advisor, their responses indicated that there was a shortage of academic advisors at their universities. Nadia commented: “There was no chance to change the advisor. There was a shortage in advisors, and we had a big number of graduate students” (July 17, 2018). Although Hoda had the chance to choose the academic advisor she wanted, she similarly reported that she chose an academic advisor who did not share the same research interest because of the shortage of academic advisors in her department. Hoda described:

My research interest is related to semantics, but there was no academic advisor with the same interest. I spent a whole semester thinking about another topic in a different field of linguistics. However, I worked on my original topic because I was passionate about it. My advisor was good in research methods but not in the theoretical framework. (June 9, 2018)

Not only was there a shortage of advisors in the participants' departments, but also there were notably fewer female academic advisors than males. Ohood explained: "Most of the faculty members who teach graduate students were males because most of female faculty members did not want to teach late in the evening" (July 4, 2018). According to most of the participants, the graduate classes were usually held late in the afternoon from three or four o'clock, and most of the female instructors preferred to teach in the morning. Also, when I asked the participants about having Saudi female faculty members, they all responded that most of the female faculty members were non-Saudis. Saudi female faculty members were underrepresented at their universities. This shortage of female advisors affected the educational experiences of some participants. Some of the participants preferred to have a female advisor to have more effective communication. However, because of the shortage, these students would choose a female advisor just because she was female, even if they did not have a common research interest. This point will be explained in more detail in the following section.

Ineffective communication. Because education in Saudi Arabia is separated by gender, the communication between Saudi females and their male advisors is based on exchanging emails and phone calls. As a result, Hoda and Mohra both stated that they chose

female advisors because they preferred to communicate with their advisors face-to-face.

Hoda argued:

I chose a female advisor because of communication. Although male instructors responded to emails, I preferred a female advisor because I wanted to communicate with her face- to-face. I felt that dealing with a male advisor by emails and phone calls was not comfortable. It was easier for me to discuss my work with the person face-to-face. (June 9, 2018)

Hoda reported having difficulty with her female advisor because they did not have the same research interest. Hoda could not find any other female advisor who could push her farther in her research, which she was passionate about. She stated: “I was very ambitious in my research. It was new and I used two different theories. However, when I did not have feedback from my advisor, and I had nobody to encourage me, I canceled one theory” (June 9, 2018). In addition, Hoda shared that her advisor made many changes to the research questions of her study, which Hoda did not like, and when Hoda shared her concern with the adviser, the advisor told her: “You have to do what I told you to do” (June 9, 2018). This mismatch between the advisor and the advisee destroyed Hoda’s enthusiasm for her research.

In contrast, Hala and Ohood reported that they preferred having a male advisor and instructors. For example, Ohood, who had a Saudi male advisor, stated:

My advisor is male and I did not find any difficulty in dealing with him. In general, I prefer to deal with males. They are very cooperative and flexible. Most of the females look for perfection. When she says something you have to do it. She does not accept suggestions. You have to meet her expectations. (July 4, 2018)

Unlike Hoda and Mohra, Ohood and Hala mentioned that before having male advisors, they were already used to dealing with male instructors in an indirect way through the TV network, emails, or phone calls.

Another aspect of communication with advisors was their availability. Two participants, Hoda and Hala, reported a lack of effective, timely, and consistent communication with their advisors, which affected their progress. Hoda shared:

I sent my proposal to the advisor in the beginning of the semester. I was waiting for her response. I needed someone who could discuss it with me. I finally got feedback from her, but at the end of the semester. (June 9, 2018)

The feedback, according to Hoda, was about the format of the proposal but not the content.

Hala similarly shared:

He [*her advisor*] spent a long time reading my thesis and giving me feedback. And when I edited and corrected the things he wanted and submitted it again, I had to wait, again, for a long time to get a response. I spent one year just following the advisor and waiting for his feedback... He rarely gave me constructive feedback. (August 1, 2018)

Thus, getting an advisor only after finishing coursework, a shortage of advisors (especially females), and ineffective communication with advisors all resulted in a major waste of time and effort. Three participants out of five spent more than two years just working on their thesis! Only two participants, Mohra and Ohood, reported a very positive academic advising experience. Mohra stated: “My advisor was the best (E)” (June 6, 2018). Mohra’s advisor helped her a lot, especially because Mohra lacked the basic preparation for conducting research and writing a thesis. Also, Ohood stated many times during the interview that her

Saudi male advisor was “very supportive (E)” (July 4, 2018) and he provided her with the guidance she needed during her journey.

The challenge with academic advising that the participants in this study reported also has been discussed in other studies. For instance, having no right to choose an academic advisor was reported by Alkhowaiter’s (2017) study that explored the challenges faced by 126 Saudi female graduate students. Also, the shortage of female academic advisors is a challenge discussed by Abo Alola (2015) and Alkhowaiter (2017). In addition, Alzoman and Alarifi (2016) argued that the participants in their study mentioned that some academic advisors were not supportive, were unavailable for communication, and were not providing constructive feedback for their students. Moreover, Abo Alola (2015) and Alkhowaiter (2017) argued that some of their participants had difficulty communicating with their male advisors. However, the two participants in this case who had male advisors, Ohood and Hala, did not report having difficulty communicating with their advisors because they were males. Both preferred to communicate with male advisors rather than females.

Challenge 5: Lack of Institutional Support

Another challenge that all the participants in this case had to face was the lack of institutional support. All the participants, in one way or another, reported a lack of university resources and/or services that would support them, as graduate students, and provide them with an effective educational environment. For example, the library is considered the heart of any academic institution, offering traditional and electronic up-to-date resources, providing students with quiet places for studying, and offering services by expert librarians and staff members to meet the students’ needs. However, such libraries were not available for the Saudi female graduates in this case. All the participants reported that the library on their

campuses was not up-to-date and did not provide them with books and other references they needed for their research theses. According to most of the participants, there was no quiet place for studying, and there were no services offered to them by librarians or trained staff members. Nadia stated: “We did not have resources or services as graduate students. Even the library was not up-to-date” (July 17, 2018). Most of the participants reported having difficulty finding references for their theses. They had to pay a large amount of money to buy academic articles and theses. Nadia added: “Finding references was a major difficulty for me. I depended on Google Scholar, but I did not have access to many articles. I had to buy them” (July 17, 2018). Hala similarly mentioned: “After buying some articles and theses, I discovered that some of them were not really helpful for my research. I wasted my money” (August 1, 2018).

When I asked the participants about the Saudi Digital Library that is supposed to give all Saudi graduate students at Saudi universities or abroad access to many databases all over the world, I received different responses. Nadia explained: “It was there, but nobody told us about it. It took me a while to learn how to use it. Then, I discovered that the theses I bought were there for free. It helped me to some extent” (July 17, 2018). Hala added: “It was new. I had to wait for months until I had access to the digital library. However, it was not very helpful. I could not find the articles I wanted. I had to buy them” (August 1, 2018). On the other hand, Hoda and Ohood expressed a more positive view about the digital library as they had this service from the beginning of their journey, not like other participants who were introduced to this service at the end of their programs (they studied in earlier years before the Saudi Digital Library was available). Ohood shared: “The Saudi Digital Library gave us

access to many databases all over the world. You can download anything for free (E)” (July 4, 2018).

In addition, most of the participants reported that they lacked services such as computer labs, printing services, professional workshops, and writing centers that could help with academic writing. The only participant who mentioned having a quiet area for studying and a computer lab that provided students with access to computers and printing services was Ohood. She stated: “There was a computer lab where you can search and print articles and a quiet area for studying in the Graduate Studies building. However, they are only open from 8 to 1 pm” (July 4, 2018). Ohood added: “Our graduate classes started usually late at 3:00 pm. We could not use the library nor the computer lab. If I wanted to use these recourses, I had to come early, which I can’t because I work in the morning” (July 4, 2018). Although these services targeted graduate students whose classes usually started in late afternoon, these services were not available to them at that time. Also, Ohood was the only participant who mentioned that she had access to some professional workshops but that was at the end of her journey. She said: “In my last year, they started to offer many useful workshops about publishing, choosing a trustworthy peer-reviewed journal, and using EndNote” (July 4, 2018). On the other hand, when I shared with the other participants the services that I can have as a graduate student in an American university, like having a writing center and writing camps, and attending free professional and academic workshops, most of them stated that they lack such resources and services. For example, Mohra responded: “We did not have such workshops. I wish I had these services in my university” (June 6, 2018).

In addition, all the participants shared that they did not have an orientation at the beginning of their programs to help them learn more about the program, its structure, and

services that were offered to students. Hoda stated: “There was no orientation. They should tell us about the master’s plan, information about faculty members, the steps I need to follow before I start working on my thesis” (June 9, 2018). When I asked Hoda if the university website was able to present all the information that should be covered by the orientation, she stated that even the website did not have all the information needed. For example, she stated: “The website of the university did not have important information about faculty members, such as their research interests” (June 9, 2018). Hoda had to contact faculty members to know their research interests in order to choose an academic advisor.

Another aspect of the lack of institutional support has to do with communication with the male administrative section of the university. When I was discussing with Mohra the lack of services and resources in her graduate program, she mentioned having difficulty communicating with the male section when she needed to translate and stamp her transcripts, which were required for her master’s program application. She explained:

I needed to have my transcripts to be translated and stamped, and that should be done only in the male section. I was separated; I had no communication with my husband, and I had no family over there. [*She lived in Riyadh and her extended family was in Dammam.*] As a female, I was not allowed to be there.

I went with my driver; he parked the car and went there. Imagine, I was waiting in the car as if I was disabled. The driver went from building to building to get my papers. And, thank God, they were cooperative and they gave him the documents because usually they have to give papers to a male relative... That was the only thing that I thought was ridiculous; why should I send the driver and not go there and get my things done. It teaches you how to

be strong after all. I could call my father or brother to come to Riyadh and help me, but I can do it myself. (June 6, 2018)

It was only in 2018 when females were allowed to have access to all-male sections of the Saudi education sectors to get the services they need. However, only Mohra mentioned having difficulty communicating with the male section; she was the only participant who was divorced and had no supportive male family member during her graduate program. Other participants shared that it was easy for them to communicate with the male section, whether with male instructors or male administrators. Hoda, for example, said that there was no difficulty to communicate with male instructors. She commented: “There was a window in our building where we used to put any required hard-copy papers to be sent to the male instructor” (June 9, 2018). Other participants stated that the use of emails and phone calls facilitated the communication with the male section. Hala and Ohood even indicated that they preferred communicating with male administrators rather than female administrators because they provided them with faster service. Hala argued: “I preferred the male administrators. When I went to female administrators asking for help, they would complicate things. So, I contacted the male section by email or phone; they responded to me immediately” (August 1, 2018).

The lack of institutional support, services, and resources was one of the major challenges that was also reported in prior literature. Abo Alola (2015), Alkhowaiter (2017), and Alzoman and Alarifi (2016) all discussed that one of the challenges that their Saudi female graduate participants faced was the lack of library services, including providing up-to-date references and printing services. Also, they mentioned that many employees in the library were not supportive. Alkhowaiter (2017) added that the graduate studies offices did

not provide students with the support they needed, such as providing workshops on research, well-maintained technical devices, and access to internet. In addition, Alzoman and Alarifi (2016) mentioned that some administrators did not perform their roles effectively.

Furthermore, Abo Alola (2015), Alkhowaiter (2017), and Alzoman and Alarifi (2016) reported that some faculty members were not qualified, not supportive, and not available for communication during their office hours. However, although some participants in this case reported having a hierarchical relationship with their instructors, others reported that their instructors were supportive and cooperative.

Challenge 6: Balancing Motherhood and Education

Most of the challenges that the participants in this case reported were academic. Being a student parent was the only social difficulty reported by the participants in this case. All the participants in this case are mothers and most of them have large families. Three participants described that they had a hard time balancing family obligations with graduate studies. Nadia, for instance, stated: “It was very hard to keep the balance between studying and spending quality time with the husband and kids” (July 17, 2018). In addition to being a full-time graduate student, two participants, Mohra and Ohood, were also full-time teachers, which increased their responsibilities. Mohra commented: “It was difficult for me to spend more than 12 hours out of my house: in work and then at the university” (June 6, 2018). However, comparing the participants in this case with the participants in the first case, it seems that this difficulty was less painful to these participants who studied at their Saudi local universities as they enjoyed great support within their Saudi social context. This point will be explained in the second theme: *strategies of success*.

No participant in this case reported any cultural or religious challenge. When I asked the participants during the interview about possible cultural or religious challenges they may have faced, they all mentioned that they did not experience any cultural or religious challenges. Then, in a follow-up question, I asked the participants if they experienced cultural challenges in moving from a more conservative town to a less conservative town or in interacting with non-Saudi instructors. All of them mentioned that they did not experience such challenges. For example, Hoda stated that moving from Jeddah to Taif did not impose any cultural difficulties because her father's family was originally from Taif. Ohood also mentioned that moving from Makkah to Taif did not impose any difficulty, especially because she lived in Taif for many years before she was enrolled in the master's program there. Nadia moved from Jeddah to Makkah, and Mohra moved from Dammam to Riyadh. All four of these cities are major cities in Saudi Arabia and less conservative. The participants moved to these cities when they got married and lived there before they started their graduate programs. In addition, none of the participants faced any cultural difficulties in dealing with their non-Saudi instructors. Most of these instructors were from neighboring Arabic countries, such as Egypt, Syria, and Sudan, or from Asia, such as India, Pakistan, and Malaysia. No participant had a non-Muslim or Western instructor/advisor. For instance, Hoda stated: "The only non-Saudi professors I met were Muslims. So, they were very aware of the culture. The only thing I noticed [*was*] that sometimes they don't think Saudis are serious about their education (E)" (February 13, 2019). Hala also said that she did not face any cultural difficulty in dealing with her Malaysian advisor.

All the existing prior literature (Abo Alola, 2015; Alkhowaiter, 2017; Alzoman & Alarifi, 2016) that I had access to focused only on the academic challenges that Saudi female

students faced within the boundaries of Saudi universities. These studies did not shed light on social or cultural challenges that may affect Saudi female educational experiences, such as being a mother or being a fulltime teacher. Also, these studies did not discuss the strategies of success and how students were able to overcome the challenges they faced.

Second Theme: Strategies of Success (Resilience)

Similar to the participants in the first case, these Saudi females, who graduated from Saudi universities, had to develop some strategies to overcome the challenges that I have discussed above. The data in this case presents an important strategy for success that the participants had: resiliency. This strategy will be explained in this section.

Resilience

Resilience was defined in the first case as “any behavioral, attributional, or emotional response to an academic or social challenge that is positive and beneficial for development” (Yeager & Dweck, 2012, p. 303). The participants in this second case developed some characteristics that made them resilient, including: setting goals, self-confidence, and seeking support. In addition to these characteristics, which were also developed by the participants in the first case, self-directed learning was another characteristic that Saudi females of this second case developed in order to overcome the academic challenges they had in their local Saudi universities.

Setting goals and moving toward them. The participants in this case, like those in the first case, showed that they had the ability to set their goals and take steps to achieve them. All five participants in this case shared that their goal after pursuing a master’s degree was to have an academic job, and all of them wanted to pursue a Ph.D. Although these

participants had to face many challenges, they resolved to achieve their goals by making realistic plans, setting priorities, and using time management skills.

Ohood stated: “Planning was very important. I had a plan for the month, the week, and the day (E)” (July 4, 2018). She added that she shared with her husband her plans to make a balance between her responsibilities as a wife/mother, teacher, and graduate student. She said: “I put [made] a plan with my husband. I told him that [on] the weekdays, especially the days I had to go to the campus after work, I would not be available, and I would not do the regular housework (E)” (July 4, 2018). She added: “The 24 hours of the day was [were] divided. I had time for work, for studying, for my kids and my husband. Friday evenings was [were] my own time when I had a break from all these responsibilities (E)” (July 4, 2018).

In line with Ohood, all the other participants mentioned that they had to manage their time wisely to meet all their responsibilities as student parents and/or as full-time teachers. Mohra described that “time management and scheduling everything (E)” (June 6, 2018) helped her to balance her work and her education. Nadia similarly mentioned: “I had a to-do list for every single day” (July 17, 2018). Hala and Hoda stated that they worked on their assignments when their children were asleep or at school. Hala described: “I managed my time; I studied in the early morning when Hoor [her two-year-old daughter] was sleeping and late at night when she was asleep” (August 1, 2018). Hoda echoed: “I was doing my assignments when my kids were in school” (June 9, 2018). Limiting social life was a necessity and a priority, especially in the collectivist Saudi society where individuals had to socialize on a daily and weekly basis with their extended families. All the participants shared that they had to limit their social responsibilities in order to focus on achieving their goals. For example, Ohood and Mohra repeated this same sentence: “I had to limit my social

life (E)” Nadia, in addition, stated: “When I started my master’s program, I was not able to visit my in-laws on every single weekend, as usual. I had to work during the weekends to finish my housework and catch up with assignments” (July 17, 2018).

Self-confidence. Self-confidence is another characteristic of resilience that the participants had. Most of the participants showed that they had confidence in their abilities and strengths. For example, Ohood commented:

I am an ambitious person. I don’t like to stay in the same position. Now, I am a high school teacher, but it is impossible for me to live all my life in this same position. I like to improve myself. I want to be a lecturer, then assistant professor, and move forward. I want to study abroad and learn more languages. (July 4, 2018)

Hoda also described that she was confident that she would finish her master’s degree and be a lecturer. She stated: “I was always imagining myself having a master’s degree and lecturing at the university. I knew I could do it” (June 9, 2018). In addition, although Mohra had a difficult time when she got divorced and when she had to face the academic challenges she had on her journey, she stated: “I was determined to get my master’s degree (E)” (June 6, 2018).

Self-directed learning. Self-directed learning is defined as “a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help from others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material resources, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes” (as cited in Loyens, Magda, & Rikers, 2008, p. 414). As discussed earlier, the participants in this case faced many academic challenges in their Saudi universities including the lack of English

proficiency, research and critical skills needed for writing a thesis, effective academic advising, constructive feedback from instructors and advisors, and institutional services and resources. As a result, these Saudi females were resilient, and they demonstrated self-directed learning ability by relying on themselves and getting help and guidance in informal ways.

First, because these Saudi female participants did not have the chance to be exposed to the English language or to interact with native speakers in their social life, most of them depended on themselves and created their own ways to improve their English by watching English movies and videos, using English learning websites on the Internet, and enrolling in private English language institutions to improve their English communication skills. In addition, all the participants described that they spent significant time on their own, reading research proposals and theses to help them learn how other researchers conducted and reported their research. Hala stated: “I read a lot of research proposals from the Internet until I found a good proposal that I tried to imitate” (August 1, 2018). Mohra similarly commented: “I was looking at different theses to see their structure and how they were written (E)” (June 6, 2018). When I described to Mohra my appreciation of her efforts to teach herself the basic skills of writing a research paper, such as writing a literature review, she said: “You either get it or look for it by yourself (E)” (June 6, 2018). Also, Hala shared: “I bought EndNote, and I watched many YouTube videos to learn how to use it” (August 1, 2018). When I asked Nadia what advice she would give any Saudi female student who wants to pursue a graduate degree in Saudi Arabia, she stated: “Teach yourself by yourself. Don’t depend on anyone” (July 17, 2018).

Moreover, with the absence of formal guidance, effective academic advising, and institutional resources, Hala was told by one of her female colleagues that there are some

online websites that provide thesis research support. She was advised by her colleague to use one of these websites, which helped her a lot with providing references for her literature review and editing and proofreading her thesis. Hala explained:

A friend of mine told me that there are websites that offer editing and proofreading services. So, I used one of these websites. The website had many British and American reviewers. They helped me with editing and proofreading. Also, they helped me to find some references and they gave me feedback for my literature review. However, it was very expensive, I paid about ten thousand Riyals [*about \$2600 U.S.*]. (August 1, 2018)

Seeking support. Another characteristic of resilience is the ability to accept and seek support. Unlike the participants in the first case who enjoyed different resources of academic support, such as having a library equipped with up-to-date references, a writing center, and many services and resources offered by the Graduate Studies Department on the campus, the participants in this case enjoyed more social support than academic support. The sources of social support available to these participants included: their husbands, extended family, friends, and/or female maids. The only academic support that was reported by some participants was from instructors and/or academic advisors. The last source of support Saudi females had was religious; all the participants reported having support from their own religious faith.

The husband. Four out of the five participants were married and all of them reported that their husbands were supportive and understanding. For example, Ohood explained:

Before applying for the master's program, I explained to my husband that I will be busy; I will go to work in the morning, and I will study in the evening.

He was very supportive, and he encouraged me. So, when you have a husband who shares a life with you and supports you, that gives you strength. (July 4, 2018)

Hala echoed a similar response: “My husband supported me a lot. He was always asking me about my progress and encouraging me to move forward, especially when I felt down” (August 1, 2018).

The extended family. All the participants in this case reported that they had support from their extended family, including their mothers, sisters, and in-laws. Hala stated: “My mother helped me with my daughters” (August 1, 2018). Mohra also said: “My in-laws helped me a lot with the kids. Also my sister (E)” (June 6, 2018). Nadia added: “When I had exams in the final week, I sent my kids to stay with my mother in Jeddah” (July 17, 2018). And Hoda shared: “My husband, my kids, and my parents all encouraged me and pushed me to have a degree” (June 9, 2018).

Female friends. Only two participants in this case reported having support from their friends. While in the first case, friends had an important role similar to the extended family role in providing social and/or academic help for the participants who studied in the U.S., friends in this case had a smaller role and they provided academic help only. In other words, the friends in this case helped the participants academically by working together and helping each other in doing assignments. Hoda stated: “My friends were supportive. We studied together and we were helping each other” (June 9, 2018). In line with Hoda, Nadia shared: “All my friends were TAs like me; we were supporting and helping each other” (July 17, 2018).

Female maids. As mentioned in the first case, having domestic or household help in Saudi Arabia is common. According to Al-Seghayer (2015b): “89% of Saudi households have at least one maid, meaning there are over 1.5 million housemaids in the Kingdom” (p. 64). And around 87.2% of Saudi families have a chauffeur or driver (Alkhaleej, 2014). Four out of the five participants in this case had a female maid who provided extra support, especially because many of the participants in this case had big families. Ohood stated: “I had a maid. You know, she helped me a lot with the housework (E)” (July 4, 2018). Nadia: “I had a female maid. Her help was needed” (July 17, 2018). Mohra: “I had a nanny. She helped me with the kids (E)” (June 6, 2018). In addition to having a female maid, four participants had drivers. I asked the participants about their mobility and whether not being allowed to drive imposed a difficulty on them or affected their educational journey, especially because females were not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia until 2017. All the participants reported that they did not have any difficulty, and their mobility was not restricted because they had a driver or their husbands drove them where they wanted. For example, Mohra responded to my question about driving: “I had my private driver. It was not an obstacle (E)” (June 6, 2018). Hoda added: “It was my husband’s commitment; if he was busy, he would send me the driver” (June 9, 2018).

Instructors and/or academic advisors. Within the academic context, the only support reported by some participants was from their instructors and/or advisors. As discussed in the academic advising section, only two out of five participants, Ohood and Mohra, reported that their academic advisors were supportive and provided them with the guidance they needed. Regarding instructors, the participants had different attitudes toward their instructors, but

most of them mentioned that their instructors were supportive, especially the young Saudi faculty members who had studied abroad.

Two participants, Mohra and Hala, reported that there was a big distance between students and instructors because of the hierarchical relationship between them. However, Mohra and Hala mentioned that although the teacher-student relationship was hierarchical and their teachers implemented traditional, outdated teacher-centered approaches, they were supportive when students asked for their help. Hala stated: “There was a big distance between teachers and students” (August 1, 2018). Mohra added: “Some professors were very strict. For example, if the professor came to the class and closed the door, no student was allowed to come after her” (June 6, 2018). In addition, Mohra described:

There was a big distance between students and teachers, but they respected us and treated us as individuals. They would remember our names. They would say over the intercom: “Where are you, Mohra? [*her pseudonym*]; you did not participate today.” So they would remember you as a living creature there.

Imagine in the bachelor degree, only in the third or fourth semester, they would start to know your name; we were anonymous. (June 6, 2018)

Mohra made a comparison between her relationship with her instructors, both males and females, in the master’s degree program and the bachelor’s degree program. She liked that there were fewer students in her graduate classes than in her undergraduate classes. As a result, unlike her undergraduate instructors, the instructors in her graduate classes were able to identify Mohra and remember her contributions. Nevertheless, Mohra and Hala did not mention that their instructors helped them with their research and writing their theses.

On the other hand, two participants (Hoda and Ohood) reported a very positive attitude toward their instructors (especially their Saudi instructors), who provided them with a source of support and encouraged them to be active learners. Hoda stated:

Our instructors were our only source of support. They taught us how to use the digital library, how to search for academic peer-reviewed articles, and how to write a literature review. They encouraged us to present at conferences.

They helped us to feel the academic life. (June 9, 2018)

Ohood echoed a similar thought:

Saudi instructors were cooperative, supportive, and understanding. They would accept your apology when you have special circumstances... They were flexible; they gave us the chance to choose which kind of exam we wanted: paper exam, open-book exam, or even to do a project. They gave me detailed feedback and responded to all my emails and my questions. (July 4, 2018)

In contrast, Ohood described some non-Saudi older instructors: “They were not flexible. They did not accept suggestions. We had to do what exactly they wanted. They gave us grades without feedback, and we did not have the right to ask why we had that grade” (July 4, 2018).

Thus, according to Hoda and Ohood, “Saudi instructors were more qualified” than their older foreign instructors for many reasons, including that these young instructors who recently graduated from British and Australian universities were able to implement modern student-centered approaches that engaged students and made them active learners. Also, these instructors treated their students as future colleagues and gave them a voice and a role

in their educational experience. Finally, these Saudi instructors were aware of their students' Saudi cultural and educational background. Therefore, the Saudi instructors were able to include the students' culture in their teaching pedagogies, and, academically, they were able to identify the points of weakness the students had in order to help them improve. Hoda stated: "Our Saudi instructors knew our cultural and educational background. They helped us because they knew the educational background of students who studied within the Saudi education system" (June 9, 2018). Ohood added: "Saudi instructors always related to Qur'anic verses and Arabic culture when they explain a linguistic aspect. For example, one of the Saudi instructors was always giving us examples from Holy Qur'an and classical Arabic poetry in his linguistic class" (July 4, 2018). On the other hand, Hoda described her experience with two non-Saudi instructors:

They were affected by stereotypes. They thought that all Saudi students are rich and lazy and they want high grades without making an effort. Another instructor was surprised how Saudi women were able to pursue a graduate degree; she was asking me many questions to know how we were allowed to study and also be wives and have kids. (June 9, 2018)

Although Ohood and Hoda felt that they were supported more by their Saudi instructors, they did not report having any cultural difficulties in dealing with non-Saudi instructors. Although Hoda discussed that some non-Saudi instructors were influenced by stereotypes and believed that Saudi students were not serious about their education, Hoda mentioned that this did not impose a cultural difficulty on her.

Because most of the Saudi instructors were males, I asked the participants if this gender difference affected their relationship with their instructors. They stated that their

Saudi male instructors were all professional and respected, and they knew the Saudi cultural limits in dealing with the opposite sex. For example, Nadia stated: “I did not care if the instructor was male or female.” She continued: “The important thing for me was how they dealt with me. It did not matter as long as the person was respected, and he knew his limits when dealing with me” (July 17, 2018).

Religious faith. The final source of support that Saudi females had was religious faith. When I asked the participants about the strategies they used to be successful, the first answer I got from most of the participants was that their success was a blessing from Allah (God), and Allah helped them to succeed. The participants’ responses included: “Allah’s help, and my parents’ prayers supported me” (Ohood, July 4, 2018); “Allah and my prayers helped me” (Hala, August, 2018); “It was a blessing from Allah” (Hoda, June 9, 2018); and “Allah was with me” (Nadia, July 17, 2018). Like the participants in the first case, many participants in this second case mentioned that when they feel down, they get strength from reading the Qur’an or praying. However, no participants in this case mentioned going to the mosque. For the participants who lived in the U.S. (first case), the mosque was not only where they practiced their faith, but it was also a social center where their children learned the Arabic language and Islamic studies, and where they felt a sense of belonging as they interacted with the Muslim community and celebrated the Muslim holidays with them. On the other hand, the participants in this case were already living with their families and enjoying being a majority in their Saudi Muslim society. Also, for Muslim women, attending the mosque is not obligatory to practice their faith. Usually Saudi females go to the mosque daily in Ramadan (a Muslim holiday).

Third Theme: Hope is Not Yet Lost

Many Saudi universities have had only a brief experience in offering graduate studies (Alkhazem, n.d). Aladady (2016) argued that many public Saudi universities are not qualified to offer graduate programs. According to Aladady (2016), some of these universities offer graduate programs while the infrastructure is not ready to offer effective undergraduate degrees. Some of these universities have a shortage of qualified faculty members (Aladady, 2016) to teach research and critical thinking skills and lack resources and services that graduate students need. There is also a lack of effective communication between students and advisors (Alkhazem, n.d). All these shortcomings of the Saudi graduate programs were mentioned by some participants in this case (as mentioned in the findings that discussed the difficulties they faced).

However, comparing the educational experiences of the three participants who graduated from the same university, Hala, Hoda, and Ohood, provided an important insight. Hala was among the first students who applied to the graduate program in Taif when it was newly opened in 2012. She stated:

There was a lack of a well-structured plan for our graduate linguistics program. The program was new. They opened it while they were not ready yet. I think the situation has changed now. I was from the first students who enrolled in the program when it opened. (August 1, 2018)

Hala reported a very negative educational experience. When I asked her about the things that satisfied her during her master's program, she said: "I was not satisfied at all (E)" (August 1, 2018). She experienced all the academic challenges that I discussed earlier in this chapter. For example, she was exposed to teacher-centered approaches that deprived her from

learning critical-thinking and research skills that she needed for conducting her research and writing her thesis. She had a negative experience with academic advising, and she lacked all kinds of formal institutional support. When Hala had a scholarship to study in a doctoral program in Canada, her Saudi master's degree was not accepted. According to Hala, one of the administrators at the Canadian university told her that she had to start a new master's program there, and if she was accepted as a doctoral student in that university, she would "struggle" (August 1, 2018).

On the other hand, Hoda and Ohood, who graduated recently in 2018, reported more positive experiences. For instance, during the interview with Ohood, she mentioned that she had "a positive experience (E)" (July 4, 2018); she repeated this statement four times. Both Ohood and Hoda were exposed to student-centered approaches, which prepared them to conduct their research. Ohood stated: "I was well prepared to conduct my research and write my thesis (E)" (July 4, 2018). Ohood argued that her bachelor's degree did not prepare her to pursue a graduate degree, but her master's degree prepared her to pursue doctoral studies not only at a local Saudi university but also abroad. According to Ohood, the program was much improved in the last year when they had a new Vice Dean and many newly employed young Saudi faculty members who graduated from British and Australian universities. Although the program still has a long road ahead before offering its students a quality education similar to the education received by Saudi female students who graduated from American universities, the experiences of these three participants showed that the program is growing and improving.

Fourth Theme: Cultural Self-Awareness

The fourth theme that emerged from the data is cultural self-awareness. It is true that the participants in this case did not have the chance to study in a culture that was different from their own and did not develop intercultural competence as a strategy of success like the participants in the first case. Yet, the participants in this second case showed that they have cultural self-awareness when they were able to discuss their attitudes toward the perception of Saudi women in Western countries and their interpretations of veil and gender segregation in their lives.

When I asked the participants about the representation of Saudi women in the Western media, its effect on Saudi women's progress, and how they would respond to those who argue that Saudi women are oppressed, I was surprised to see how these participants were very excited to discuss these questions and share their opinions. For instance, Hala responded: "I don't see myself as oppressed. In contrast, I have been supported by my father, brothers, and my husband. I don't think that this perception will affect Saudi women's progress" (August 1, 2018). Also, Nadia mentioned that this idea of Saudi women's oppression is "not right." She continued:

They [*some Western people*] look at Saudi women from their perspective. Look at me. I am an example. I got married when I was very young, and nobody forced me to get married. My husband supported me to pursue my bachelor's and master's degrees, and through the journey I had five children and a job. I was responsible for all my decisions, and nobody told me to do this or not to do that. There was always a discussion and dialogue. (July 17, 2018)

Similarly, Hoda did not agree that Saudi women are oppressed. She added that the Western view ignores women's differences and imposes its values:

First, women suffer in all the world countries. Second, freedom for me is different from yours. If you impose your interpretation of freedom on me, that is in itself an oppression. I feel that the West wants to impose a specific picture for a strong woman, for a working woman. For example, a working successful woman is always presented as a woman wearing a miniskirt or a business suit with high heels. It is weird for the West to see a successful woman having a role in society wearing a black hijab and covering her face.

(June 9, 2018)

In addition, Mohra explained that she is not oppressed, and when her ex-husband tried to abuse her, she got a divorce. For Mohra, oppression exists not because of Islam but, rather, because of some cultural practices and because of the hierarchy of the Saudi system itself.

She stated:

This perception does not affect us. We are who we are. They want to see it or not... There are oppressed women in every country... I am not oppressed, and I don't know any women in my society who are oppressed. But I know that, in Saudi Arabia, there are many oppressed women and even some who are abused. When my husband tried to hit me, I got a divorce and I left him... I have freedom: I study, travel, and I do what I want. If there is oppression, it is not because of Islam; it is because of the hierarchy of the system. It is cultural; we created these complications. (June 6, 2018)

Ohood also shared her opinion:

I don't think that Saudi women are oppressed. Any Saudi woman who suffers from oppression today is because of her choices. She is the one who gave others control over her life; she is the one who was willing to sacrifice her rights. Freedom is a choice. (July 4, 2018)

Although the unemployment rates among women are higher than men in Saudi Arabia, Ohood argued that Saudi women have the same access to education, and in terms of wages, Saudi women receive equal wages to men. Ohood discussed: "My salary is equal to any Saudi male teacher's salary in the education field. Even recently when the government started to pay the additional cost-of-living allowance, it did not exclude females because males have more financial responsibilities than females" (July 4, 2018).

In addition to the Western perception of Saudi women, the veil was another important aspect that the participants discussed. All the participants had a positive attitude toward the veil, and they all argued that wearing the veil is a religious duty, in addition to being part of the Saudi cultural identity. Nadia shared: "It is part of us, part of our social structure. At the same time, I don't feel that it is imposed on me. I think it is a religious duty; I wear it in Saudi Arabia and abroad" (July 17, 2018). Hala similarly added: "The hijab is part of my religion. It is my identity." When I asked Hala what identity she meant: the Muslim identity or the Saudi cultural identity, she responded: "My Muslim identity. I wore the veil even when I was in Canada" (August 1, 2018). Also, Ohood stated: "The hijab is from Allah. It is a protection for us (E)" (July 4, 2018). While for Ohood wearing the veil is a way to protect women from being sexually exploited, for Hoda wearing the veil is a sign of strength and a way that equalizes men and women. Hoda explained:

It is a religious duty. I think wearing the veil nowadays is also a sign of strength. I wear it because I am able to show my religious identity and practice my personal freedom. I think wearing the hijab helps in making men and women equal in the workplace. For example, when I wear the hijab, I neutralize my sexuality and force the person who is dealing with me to not judge my appearance or think of anything else, but rather to respect my intellectuality. (June 9, 2018)

Mohra was the only participant in the study who was not veiled. She commented that she wears the veil out of respect because it is the dress code of Saudi Arabia. She commented: “I’m not veiled, while my sister who is younger than me is veiled, and she covers her face. It is a personal choice; no one has to. But out of respect, I cover my head” (June 6, 2018). Although Mohra’s father gave his daughters the choice to cover the face, it was not a choice for her when she was a graduate student at the Saudi university. It is true that Saudi females do not wear hijab on the campus because it is separated by gender, but the regulation at Mohra’s Saudi university was that female students had to wear their hijab, including covering the face, when they left the campus. At Mohra’s university, the female security officers would notice if students were wearing their full hijab and covering the face when students were leaving the campus. Therefore, Mohra shared her annoyance that covering the face was not optional. She stated: “I thought, ‘I am old enough to decide myself’ (E)” (June 6, 2018). It was only in 2018 that Dr. Haya Al Awad, the Saudi Deputy Minister for female education, announced that the Saudi Education Ministry would not be imposing any form of hijab on Saudi females, and wearing any form of hijab is up to the students and their families (Abdullah, 2018).

Although Mohra was not veiled, she stated: “I will be committed to it later (E)” And she expressed a very positive view about the veil:

It is not a sign of oppression; it is a religious requirement, to be honest. Also, I think whenever you wear the veil or head scarf, you are telling people that you are not approachable, and you are saying: I am not here to seduce you; I am here as a professional person. (June 6, 2018)

In addition, no participant in this case mentioned that wearing the veil was an obstacle for her progress or that it negatively affected her education. Hala: “I don’t see that the hijab can be a restriction or an obstacle for my progress” (August 1, 2018). Nadia and other participants were surprised that I asked them if the veil affected their education because they think that there is no relationship between the veil and their education, as they do not wear the veil in their female schools or universities. Nadia said: “I don’t think it affected my education. Actually, it has nothing to do with the education. You know, our universities are not mixed” (July 17, 2018). Ohood echoed: “As a Saudi society separated by gender, the hijab has not been a problem or obstacle, especially in our universities and schools” (July 4, 2018).

Because the veil and gender segregation were two interrelated factors mentioned by the participants, I had the chance to ask the participants about their attitudes toward gender segregation. Ohood responded: “The hijab and gender segregation have not prevented me from achieving my goals or affected my progress. Gender segregation gives us more privacy” (July 4, 2018). Nadia added:

I don’t see that gender segregation is restrictive. Instead, it is very convenient; it gives us more freedom. For example, you can see veiled women in other Arabic countries, how they wear the hijab all the daylong. We are here having

more freedom; we can wear what we want. Thank God the hijab does not restrict us. We had education, we had degrees and positions; we share life with men, and we know how to deal with them in our own way. (July 17, 2018)

So, according to Nadia, gender segregation that characterizes the Saudi society provided her with more freedom, but at the same time this segregation did not mean that Saudi women are not able to deal and communicate effectively with men. To have effective communication with men does not always mean sitting side by side with them.

In addition, among the huge reforms that Saudi Arabia witnessed in the last two years are: giving women the choice whether to wear the veil, allowing gender-mixed events in major cities, lifting the ban on female driving, eliminating the authority of the male guardian, and increasing women's participation in the workforce. Similar to the participants in the first case, when I asked the participants in this case about their attitudes toward these reforms, they shared that they generally agree on these reforms. However, most of the participants followed their agreement with a statement that showed their concern about losing their social and cultural identity. For example, Nadia stated: "We want the change but it has to be within the limits. The change was rapid and stressful. We don't want to move from one extreme to another. We want moderation" (July 17, 2018). Ohood added: "

I strongly agree with the reforms. However, we don't want to lose our values.

I always tell my students: "Be strong, learn, and achieve your dreams, but you have to keep your values and beliefs. The tree grows and changes its leafs but it does not change its roots." (July 4, 2018)

Hoda discussed:

I am happy with the reforms they made. However, these reforms are very late. Actually, Islam has given us all our rights before these reforms took place. Our struggle is the struggle between the two extremes. Some people think that progress is a whole package that should be taken from the West with no filters, and those people who want to change the society to a Western society are the ones who give the chance to the extremely conservative people to argue and resist any kind of change. If we did not appreciate our own identity, no one will respect us. (June 9, 2018).

While some participants stated that these reforms were late or rapid and stressful, Mohra stated that “the reforms are not empowering all Saudi women, only empowering a few individual ladies who were specifically chosen (E)” (June 6, 2018). Mohra explained that these few appointments are tokens and don not change the power of Saudi women in general. In addition, similar to the participants in the first case, all the participants in this case agreed on making the veil optional and eliminating the guardian authority. Hoda stated, “Not every single male is qualified to be responsible for his family or his female relative” (June 9, 2018).

Fifth Theme: A Journey of Transformation

Similar to the participants in the first case who studied at American universities, the participants in this case also reported that their journey of pursuing a master’s degree at a Saudi university was a journey of transformation that helped them to grow personally and academically. Personally, many students reported that they had become stronger and more responsible, independent, and self-confident. Hala, for instance, stated: “During the four years of the master’s program, many things have changed in me. I have become more mature. I have learned how to be patient and more independent” (August 1, 2018). Mohra also

mentioned that she had become “more responsible,” “more independent,” and “wiser” (June 6, 2018). In addition to being stronger and more independent, Ohood said: “I have recognized the importance of my husband’s support” (July 4, 2018). Also, Hoda shared: “I have more self-confidence” (June 9, 2018) as a lecturer and when she delivers presentations.

Academically, most of the participants mentioned that they became self-directed learners, more professional in their careers as English instructors, and more motivated to pursue a Ph.D. in the future. Hala and Hoda reported that they became more self-directed learners. For example, Hala said: “I have learned that I can depend on myself and teach myself without waiting for anyone” (August 1, 2018). Hoda echoed: “I have learned how to be more independent. Whether my advisor was supportive or not and whether my instructor was supportive or not, I was the one who was responsible for my own education and my decisions” (June 9, 2018). In addition, many participants responded that their master’s degree helped them to be more professional in their work as English teachers/lecturers. Nadia and Ohood shared that they have become “more professional,” and they help their students to be active learners. Also, Hoda stated: “I have learned how to be more critical...Also, regarding the language, I have become more fluent in English. I felt that my English language has improved” (June 9, 2018). In addition, Ohood and Mohra shared that after earning their master’s degrees, they were more motivated to pursue a Ph.D. Ohood said: “I have more confidence and motivation to pursue Ph.D. abroad” (July 4, 2018).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reported the findings of the second case, which examined the educational experiences of Saudi females who graduated from Saudi universities with a master’s degree in the English language (Linguistics and Translation). I started the chapter

with a detailed description of the five participants, and then I discussed five major themes that arose from the data. The five themes included: challenges on the journey, strategies for success, hope is not yet lost, cultural self-awareness, and a journey of transformation. The next chapter provides a comparison between the two cases and an analysis of both cases from a postcolonial feminism theory lens.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

This chapter has two goals. First, this chapter compares the findings of the two cases of this study. The goal of this comparison is to give a bigger picture of the two cases. The following figure (Figure 6.1.) compares the themes that emerged from this research study. Second, this chapter provides an analysis of the two cases based on postcolonial feminist theory.

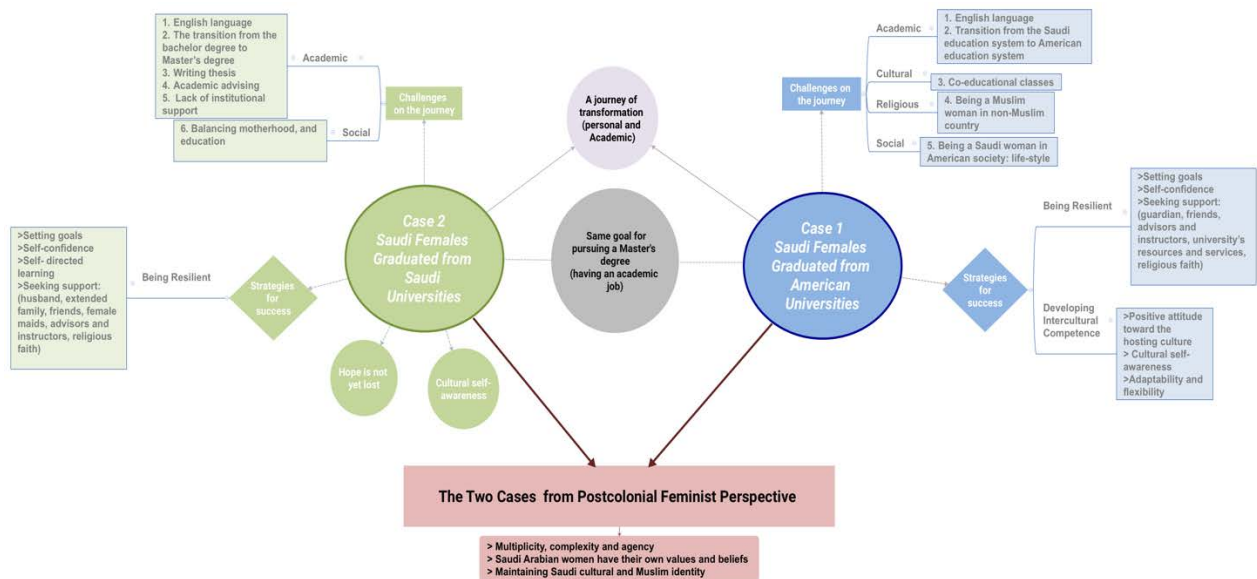


Figure 6.1. Comparison of the two cases of the study

Comparing the Findings of the Two Cases

To give an overview, this study is a qualitative multi-case study that has two cases. The first case examines the educational experiences of five Saudi females who graduated with a master's degree in an English language related field from five different American universities. The second case examines the educational experiences of five Saudi females who graduated with a master's degree in an English language related field from three

different Saudi universities. This study explores the difficulties these two groups have faced and the strategies they have used to succeed in Saudi and American higher education institutions. Also, this study provides an understanding of the roles that culture, religion, gender and the English language play in these Saudi females' academic experiences. This research study sheds light on how these two groups' educational experiences in these two dissimilar international contexts influence their views, values, and concepts of education and their personal identities as Saudi women.

In addition, I used a combination of two types of purposeful sampling: homogeneous and snowball sampling. I selected the ten Saudi female participants based on the following criteria:

- First Case: Four to five Saudi females who graduated with a master's degree in a field related to the English language (including English literature, linguistics, applied linguistics, translation, TESOL, ESOL) from American universities within two to five years, and whose ages ranged between twenty-five and thirty-five.
- Second Case: Four to five Saudi females who graduated with a master's degree in a field related to the English language (including English literature, linguistics, applied linguistics, translation, TESOL, ESOL) from Saudi universities within two to five years, and whose ages ranged between twenty-five and thirty-five.

However, the participants also shared some characteristics that were not part of the criteria mentioned above. For example, all the participants identified themselves as middle-class women, and all of them are Sunni Muslims. Most of the participants (9 out of 10) are veiled and married with children. Also, most of them (8 out of 10) are employed (7 lecturers and 1

high school teacher). In addition, all of the participants experienced English education in Saudi public schools. Only three participants in this study reported that they learned English at home before they were enrolled in Saudi public schools. Although the ten participants shared many cultural, religious, and socioeconomic characteristics, their educational experiences were complex.

Two methods of data collection were used in this study: in-depth semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Also, I used thematic analysis to analyze each case (within-case analysis), and then I used a cross-case analysis by looking at similarities and differences across both cases to generate themes from the entire data of the two cases of this study. Thus, this section compares the themes that emerged from both cases. The comparison includes a discussion of the following themes that emerged from the entire corpus of data: a journey of challenges and opportunities, strategies for success, and a journey of transformation.

A Journey of Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges on the journey was the first theme that was discussed in both cases. In each case, Saudi female participants faced different challenges because they studied in two different contexts: in the United States and in Saudi Arabia. By looking at the challenges in both cases, it is clear that Saudi female participants in the first case, who graduated from American universities, were supported academically more than culturally, socially, and religiously. The map above, Figure 6.1., shows that these women faced only two academic challenges. The rest of the challenges they faced were cultural, religious and social. In contrast, the Saudi female participants in the second case, who graduated from Saudi universities, were supported culturally, socially, and religiously more than academically.

The map above shows that these participants faced five academic challenges compared to only one social challenge.

Academically. Many old American universities date back to the 17th century. For example, Harvard University was established in 1636, The College of William and Mary was established in 1693, and St. John's College was established in 1696 (Collier, 2018). In addition, American universities have opened their doors to international students from all over the world since 1946 and have offered their students one of the best educational systems globally (Caldwell, 2013; Shabeeb, 1996). Although receiving an education at most American universities is not free, as it is at Saudi public universities, American universities offer strong graduate programs that have all the academic resources and services students need, such as well-structured graduate plans, effective coursework, qualified faculty members, and up-to-date libraries, writing centers, and professional workshops.

On the other hand, the modern nation state of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932, and its public education system is only 40 years old (Al-Seghayer, 2015b). Many Saudi universities have offered graduate studies only a short time (Alkhazem, n.d), and some universities are not qualified to offer graduate studies (Aladady, 2016) for many reasons, including having a shortage of qualified advisors and faculty and limited resources, services, and modern teaching pedagogies (Alkhazem, n.d.).

As a result of this gap between the older American education system and the young Saudi education system, Saudi females of the first case, who studied at American universities, faced fewer academic challenges than the participants in the second case, who graduated from Saudi universities. Although the five participants who studied at American universities expressed difficulty in adapting to American education, they expressed that

American education was more effective than Saudi education, and they shared their appreciation for the different forms of academic support they received from their instructors and their advisors and the extensive library services and writing centers. All five participants who studied in the U.S. were able to finish their master's degree in just two years. In contrast, most of the Saudi females of the second case finished their degree in three to four years in the Saudi master's programs because they faced many academic challenges in writing the thesis, academic advising, and a lack of institutional support.

English proficiency was another academic challenge that most of the participants in both cases faced (seven participants out of ten). All the participants in both cases were exposed to Saudi public school English education that started in the middle school when the participants were about 13 years old. Only three participants reported that they were exposed to English in childhood (Noof lived nine years of her childhood in the U.S., and Mohra and Ohood learned English at home in Saudi Arabia from their fathers before they were enrolled in Saudi schools). All other participants had to work hard to improve their English proficiency even though they had bachelor's degrees in English. While the participants in the first case were exposed to English in their social life and interacted with native speakers in the U.S., the female participants in the second case had to create their own ways to improve their English (watching English videos and movies and reading English materials).

Hope is not yet lost was another theme that was discussed in the second case to show that, although some Saudi graduate programs need tremendous reforms, they are taking steps toward making improvements. Comparing the experiences of three participants who graduated from the same Saudi university in the city of Taif (a conservative city) provided an important insight. The first participant, Hala, who enrolled in this graduate English program

when it was opened in 2012, reported a very negative academic experience, while the other two participants, who graduated in 2018, reported positive experiences. The English graduate program of this university has witnessed some improvements since it was opened in 2012. These improvements include providing its recent students with more qualified Saudi faculty members and advisors who implement critical and active teaching strategies and help their students to be more prepared for conducting their graduate research and writing their theses. Moreover, the participants who graduated from American universities (case 1) are influencing the Saudi system toward important reforms. For example, they are currently all lecturers in Saudi universities. All these participants reported that they use the effective teaching strategies they learned in the U.S. with their students. They mentioned that the undergraduate education in Saudi Arabia recently is moving toward teacher-centered approaches, and, they, as instructors, are teaching research and academic writing skills to their students. Thus, comparing the participants' educational experiences in Saudi Arabia and the U.S. showed that the Saudi educational system needs many serious reforms. However, it is important to acknowledge that major educational reforms require time and effort. The Saudi educational system is taking steps toward making improvements, and the road is long.

Culturally. While Saudi females of the first case, who studied at American universities, were supported academically, they faced more cultural, social, and religious challenges than the participants in the second case, who studied and graduated from their local Saudi universities. The cross-cultural transition from Saudi Arabia to the U.S. and the huge cultural gap between the two countries imposed some difficulties on the Saudi females of the first case, such as: studying in American co-educational classes that were totally different from Saudi female classes in Saudi Arabia, and experiencing discrimination and/or

curiosity for being a Muslim woman in a non-Muslim country. Also, living in the U.S. led to missing the lifestyle and social supports these Saudi women had in Saudi Arabia. For example, as student parents, some participants missed the support of their extended family and their female maids. One of the participants reported having difficulties teaching Arabic language and Islamic principles to her children. Other participants missed the women-only salons, gyms, and spas in Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, the participants in the second case, who did not experience cross-cultural transition, did not have most of these non-academic challenges. They enjoyed all the kinds of social, religious, and cultural supports that they had in their country. Although these participants mentioned having difficulty balancing motherhood and education, they, on the other hand, were supported by their extended families, female maids, and nannies.

Strategies for Success

To overcome the challenges, in both cases the participants were able to be resilient. The characteristics of resiliency included: setting goals and moving toward them, self-confidence, and seeking available support. In the U.S. context of the first case, academic support was received from advisors, instructors, and other academic services and resources. In the Saudi context of the second case, the main support received was social, and it came from husbands, extended family, female maids, and friends. In both cases, participants expressed that they gained strength from their Islamic faith by performing prayers, reading the Qur'an, and trusting Allah. In addition to these characteristics of resilience, the participants in the second case demonstrated self-directed learning by relying on themselves and getting help and guidance in informal ways due to the lack of formal academic support at their Saudi universities.

Intercultural competence was the second strategy used by only the participants in the first case who studied at American universities. These participants had to develop intercultural competence to effectively communicate with American people who were culturally different from the participants. These participants showed that they had three elements of intercultural competence. First, they had positive attitudes toward the host culture, its diversity, and its multicultural education. Second, the participants showed that they had cultural self-awareness; they were able to express their attitudes toward the perception of Saudi women in the West, and their interpretation of their veil and gender segregation. Third, the participants showed adaptability and flexibility. For example, the participants did not all wear the same traditional black abaya; instead, they wore different forms of veils and one participant stopped covering her face. Many participants reported that they were flexible and able to cope with change. Also, most of the participants discussed that they had to change some of their behaviors toward male classmates in order to respect U.S. educational and social norms. For example, although meeting and interacting with non-relative males outside the classroom or workplace is not acceptable in the Saudi culture, one participant discussed that she interacted and cooperated with male classmates outside the classroom to work on group projects. In addition, all the participants reported that they adapted to American education, which is based on interactive learning, and they currently use these interactive learning strategies in their classrooms as instructors at their Saudi universities.

In the second case, the intercultural competence theme did not appear as a strategy of success because these participants studied at universities in their own culture. Although these participants had to interact with non-Saudi instructors at the Saudi universities, the

communication between students and instructors was formal and limited to the classroom setting. For example, some participants reported that there was a hierarchical relationship and a big distance between students and faculty members. Also, the interaction between male instructors and the Saudi female students was more formal and limited. Therefore, the data of the second case did not show that the participants in this case developed all three elements of intercultural competence (positive attitude toward the new culture through ‘respect, openness and discovery’, cultural self-awareness, and adaptability and flexibility) when they interacted with non-Saudi instructors or when they moved from one city in Saudi Arabia to another.

Unlike the first case where cultural self-awareness was an embedded theme within the intercultural competence theme, in the second case, cultural self-awareness emerged from the data as a separate major theme. In this theme, the participants who did not study abroad discussed their attitudes toward the perception of Saudi women in Western countries, and their interpretations of veil and gender segregation in their lives.

A Journey of Transformation

In both cases, pursuing a graduate degree and facing different opportunities and challenges on the road was a transformational journey that helped all the participants grow personally and academically. On the personal level, many participants in both cases reported that they had more self-confidence and became stronger and more independent. Many participants in the first case, who studied in the U.S., added that they became more open and had more acceptance of people who are culturally different from them and who hold different views and opinions. Also, some participants discussed that they learned how to live on a tight budget and how to set boundaries in relationships.

On the academic level, many participants in both cases and who are currently English lecturers and teachers in Saudi Arabia mentioned that they use the modern methods of teaching that encourage interactive and collaborative learning. Even the participants in the second case, who were not exposed to these teaching methods during their master's program, mentioned the importance of teaching their students research skills and helping them become active learners. In addition, while all the participants in the first case reported that their English fluency improved by living and studying in the U.S., only two participants in the second case reported that their English fluency improved by pursuing a master's degree in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, becoming a self-directed learner was clearer among the participants in the second case, who suffered from a lack of formal institutional support at their Saudi universities.

The Two Cases of Saudi Women's Educational Experiences from a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Muslim women, and specifically Saudi women, are misrepresented in the Euro-American media. By looking at contemporary literature on Muslim women, including Saudi women, we find that Islam is portrayed as an oppressive religion, and Muslim women are represented as either victims or survivors, escapees of Islam (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Ameri, 2012; Kahf, 1999). For example, Saudi Arabia's history of gender segregation, wearing the veil, and the ban on women driving has been a focal point for Western gaze. Many Western feminists and activists have the perception that a Saudi woman cannot wear what she wants; she has to be veiled in black from head to toe. Also, they often think that a Saudi woman is not allowed to study or work with men; she has to be in gender-segregated places. A Saudi woman cannot vote or even drive her own car. For

these feminists, a Saudi woman is subordinated to men, has no voice, and cannot travel or get an education without her mahram's (guardian's) permission. In other words, a Saudi woman is a miserable, oppressed, voiceless victim (Al-Seghayer, 2015b).

However, this widely spread image of oppressed Muslim women in the Middle East, and in Third World countries in general, has been challenged by postcolonial feminists (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Mohanty, 1988). The theoretical framework of postcolonial feminism is used in this study as an analytic lens to understand and acknowledge the complexity of the Saudi female participants' educational experiences. By basing this study in a postcolonial feminist theoretical framework, my aim is to open an intellectual space for the Saudi female participants to voice their views of their own culture, religion, and education. Instead of just categorizing them as victims of their culture or as survivors who have escaped and rejected their norms, my intention is to introduce the Saudi women's lived experiences as they were expressed by the participants themselves. Also, instead of speaking *for* them, this study gives them the opportunity to speak for themselves.

Chapter 2 provided a detailed discussion of postcolonial theory, its views on Muslim women in the Middle East and Third World countries, and how Muslim women are represented in Western discourse based on the power relation between the West and the East. In the following section, I discuss the experiences of the study participants in both cases from the postcolonial feminist perspective. This analysis includes a discussion of three points. The first point is *multiplicity, complexity, and agency*. In this point I discuss that Saudi women's experiences are complex, and they cannot be simply categorized as one group of oppressed women who have no agency. The second point is *Saudi Arabian women have their own values and beliefs*. Here I discuss that, while Western White feminists assume their

superiority and try to universalize and impose their own values, Saudi women have their own distinct values, beliefs and interpretations of their cultural and religious practices. The last point is *maintaining Saudi cultural and Muslim identity*. This point shows how the participants resist American cultural and linguistic imperialism and try to maintain their cultural and Muslim identity while progressing and seeking modernity.

Multiplicity, Complexity, and Agency

Postcolonial feminists have criticized how Western feminism (U.S. White middle-class feminism of the second wave) categorized all Muslim women in one homogeneous group, or as Mohanty (1988) described it, as a “singular group on the basis of a shared oppression” (p. 53). “Instead of analytically demonstrating the production of women as socio-economic political groups within particular local contexts” (Mohanty, 1988, p. 60), Western feminists assumed sameness of Saudi women’s experiences. Isolating Saudi women from their cultural, historical, and political contexts increased the gap between Saudi Arabia and the United States and contributed to spreading the idea of Saudi women’s oppression. By using a postcolonial feminist theoretical framework, I was determined to capture the Saudi female participants’ lived experiences, to understand the complexity of their lives, and to honor their own interpretations.

First, the literature review in Chapter 2 provided an overview of the Saudi historical, sociopolitical, and cultural context that has shaped Saudi women’s education and identity. The literature review discussed critical transformations (including the discovery of oil, the Islamic revival movement, and the reforms of the Saudi 2030 vision) that Saudi Arabia has undergone in its transition from the past to the present—this past was not so long ago as Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932 and its public education system is only 40 years old.

These changes that this young country has witnessed have created new conditions, opportunities, and concerns. All the complex societal transitions mentioned in the literature review demonstrated why Saudi women's identities cannot be easily taken for granted. Second, during the research design phase of this study, and during the data analysis, I was careful to pay attention to the differences among the participants in order to understand their experiences. While this study consists of two major cases, I considered every single participant's experience within each case as a subcase, or an embedded case. Third, in reporting the findings of each case (Chapters 4 and 5), I purposively and heavily quoted the participants to honor their voices and to present their unique perspectives.

Although the participants in this study shared some commonalities, such as being a Muslim middle-class Saudi female exposed to Saudi public education and having a master's degree in an English-related field, these participants grew up in different familial circumstances and had different educational opportunities. Some participants lived in major modernized cities in Saudi Arabia, while others were raised in smaller, conservative cities. Some of the participants had educated fathers who studied abroad, and others did not. Some participants were fortunate to learn English in childhood, while others had to wait until they were exposed to Saudi English education in middle school. Some participants had large families, which affected their opportunities to study abroad. In addition, the participants who studied at American universities that hosted a large number of Saudi students reported different experiences than the participants who studied at universities with a smaller number of Saudi students and which lacked awareness of Saudi culture. The participants who studied at Saudi universities with more developed English graduate programs had more positive experiences than those who were enrolled in programs that still lacked systematic structure

and institutional support. This diversity among the participants affected their educational experiences, their opportunities, and their perspectives.

Furthermore, instead of erasing women's agency and trying to speak for them or to civilize them, postcolonial feminism emphasizes that different women have different strengths and strategies to achieve their goals (Crowley, 2014). Hence, the reader is advised to understand the lived experiences of the ten participants without judging what went right or wrong, and without judging if they were oppressed or not (oppression is seen differently based on our own lenses). Instead, the reader is advised to understand their experiences with the intention to see their agency, their interpretation of their experiences, and how they react to challenges they faced. All the participants in the two cases demonstrated a strong desire to achieve their goals, and they were determined to succeed. Although they may have had different challenges, they were resilient by developing their own ways to succeed within their different contexts. All the participants had strong voices and were able to reflect on their lived experiences and to express their views.

Saudi Arabian Women Have Their Own Values and Beliefs

The Western perception of Saudi women as oppressed women is a result of using Western standards of women's rights when analyzing women's issues in Saudi Arabia:

The cultural constructs of each society propel certain understandings of gender roles. The United States provides a distinct cultural framework for feminism, as well as the pervasive and ongoing struggles associated with being female that may or may not translate internationally. All countries have vastly differing histories, myths, socioeconomic frameworks and evolving

social expectations that impact what it means to be male or female in each society, and thus these issues may translate differently. (Dixon, 2001, para. 9)

By assuming superiority of the West over the East (the inferior other), Western feminists tried to universalize and impose their values when discussing women's issues in the Middle East and Third World countries (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Le Renard, 2014; Mahmood, 2005, Mohanty, 1988). For example, wearing the veil and gender segregation were interpreted by some Western feminists as signs of oppression, backwardness, and male domination in Saudi Arabia.

However, Saudi participants in this study have different attitudes toward their status as women, and toward the veil and gender segregation in their country. The participants in the first case, who experienced a cross-cultural transition from Saudi Arabia to the U.S., were able to compare, analyze, and evaluate different aspects of culture and education between the two countries. The participants in the second case, who graduated from their local Saudi universities, were more articulate and got deeper in expressing their attitudes toward the ideas of Saudi women's oppression, veil, and gender segregation. I noticed that the participants in the second case expressed their views in detail more than the participants in the first case (look at Table 6.1. and Table 6.2. to see how the quotes by the participants in the second case are all longer than the quotes by the participants in the first case). I was amazed to see how the participants were excited and how they appreciated the chance to voice their opinions. Table 6.1. shows the responses of the participants in both cases to my question about the representation of Saudi women in the Western media and how they would respond to those who argue that Saudi women are oppressed.

None of the ten participants in the two cases (those who studied in their homeland and those who left their circle and were exposed to more liberal, open lives in America) perceived themselves as oppressed women (see Table 6.1.). Many participants argued that the Western misrepresentation of Saudi women occurs because many Westerners look at women from their own cultural perspective, and many of them are trying to impose their values and interpretations upon those who are different. These Saudi participants expressed different views about oppression and freedom. Some participants shared that oppression is a choice in which the woman is responsible for giving others control over her life. Other participants indicated that women's oppression is everywhere, and when a Saudi woman is oppressed, it is not because of Islam, but because of the hierarchy of the system, and because of some cultural practices. Also, many participants in both cases echoed a similar thought: that they had "a luxurious life in Saudi Arabia." The luxurious life for these middle-class women had different meanings. For one participant, the luxurious life is having free education with no need to work more than one job to pay a student loan. Some participants mentioned having a luxurious life in Saudi Arabia because they were assisted by their extended family, by female maids for household work, and/or by drivers for mobility. For some participants, having a luxurious life meant being served by a mahram/guardian (husband, father, brother) who offers not only emotional support but also physical, concrete support, such as helping with family responsibilities or doing official papers on their behalf, especially with the administrative male sections in Saudi Arabia. For many Western feminists, the concept of having a guardian is interpreted as dependency on males and lacking agency, instead of interpreting it as being very important for some Saudi women who live in a collectivist society.

Table 6.1.

Participants' Responses About the Misrepresentation of Saudi Women in the Western Media

First Case	Second Case
No, we are not [<i>oppressed</i>]. We have everything we need. To the contrary, we have a luxurious life in Saudi Arabia.	I don't see myself as oppressed. In contrast, I have been supported by my father, brothers, and my husband.
Not at all; we are not oppressed. In contrast, whatever we want we can get... Also, our men are not aggressive the way they are portrayed in Western media. We are served by the father, the husband, or the brother	Not right... They [<i>some Western people</i>] look at Saudi women from their perspective. Look at me, I am an example. I got married when I was very young, and nobody forced me to get married. My husband supported me to pursue my bachelor's and master's degrees, and through the journey, I had five children and a job.
This is a misconception. If I am oppressed, I would not have the chance to study in the United States. Thank God I have access to all my rights.	First, women suffer in all the world countries. Second, freedom for me is different from yours. If you impose your interpretation of freedom on me, that is in itself an oppression. I feel that the West wants to impose a specific picture for a strong woman, for a working woman. For example, a working successful woman is always presented as a woman wearing a miniskirt or a business suite with high heels. It is weird for the West to see a successful woman having a role in society wearing black hijab and covering her face.
I am not oppressed. They look at this point from their perspective, not from our perspective. They don't know enough about our culture and religion.	This perception does not affect us. We are who we are. They want to see it or not... There are oppressed women in every country... I am not oppressed, and I don't know any women in my society who are oppressed. But I know that in Saudi Arabia, there are many oppressed women and even abused. When my husband tried to hit me, I got divorce and I left him... I have freedom: I study, travel, and I do what I want. If there is oppression, it is not because of Islam; it is because of the hierarchy of the system, it is cultural; we created these complications.
I have the freedom to do what I want, especially in my country where the hijab is not an obstacle to my progress.	I don't think that Saudi women are oppressed. Any Saudi women who suffers from oppression today is because of her choices. She is the one who gave others control over her life; she is the one who was willing to sacrifice her rights. Freedom is a choice.

Furthermore, all the participants in the two cases had positive attitudes toward the veil and gender segregation in Saudi society. The veil for all of them is a religious duty; however, in the second case of Saudi university graduates, the veil was also seen as part of the Saudi

social and cultural structure. For them, wearing the veil was not a restriction or obstacle for success. Even Mohra, who was the only participant who was not veiled, expressed that the veil is a religious requirement that she would be committed to later, and currently she is loosely covering her head with a scarf just to show respect for the dress code of her society. Also, some participants discussed additional meanings of the veil. For example, some participants argued that the veil is a sign of strength for being able to resist Western influence and display religious identity. Also, some participants stated that the veil is a way to equalize men and women by protecting women from being sexually exploited and by respecting a woman's intellectuality instead of judging her appearance. Regardless of all these different meanings attached to wearing the veil for Saudi participants, the veil is interpreted by Western feminists as a sign of oppression and sexual control.

On the other hand, gender segregation for the participants in both cases was a part of their cultural identity that provided them with more privacy and more freedom to study and work without the need to wear the veil for long hours each day. However, this segregation of the Saudi society was interpreted by Western feminists as a sign of inferiority and marginalization for Saudi women (Le Renard, 2014). Some studies investigating the experiences of Saudi female students abroad described Saudi participants as being shy, having no confidence, and unable to express their opinions in mixed-gender classrooms because they had been raised to be submissive to men (Altamimi, 2014; Moursi, 2018). It is true that the participants in the first case reported having various levels of discomfort/anxiety being with Saudi males in U.S. classes, especially when in small groups or in pairs. However, they emphasized that their discomfort did not affect their participation or their confidence to express their ideas or opinions in their graduate classes. One participant of the second case

provided an important insight when she mentioned that, although she preferred gender segregation, that did not mean that Saudi women couldn't deal with or communicate with Saudi men. They can effectively communicate with Saudi men according to the Saudi cultural norms of the interaction between males and females, which indicate that the interaction should be formal, limited, and with clear boundaries.

By focusing on stories of women's oppression and the negative cultural practices in Muslim societies, Western feminists have tried to play the role of the savior who helps and liberates these women (Abu-Lughod, 2013). However, because these Saudi female participants did not see themselves as oppressed women, they did not mention that they needed to be saved or liberated by the West. The participants in this study were not only from the Middle East but also from Saudi Arabia, which is heavily criticized by the West as being one of the world's countries that leave women without many human rights. However, the study participants did not mention that they felt they were restricted or lacked human rights in their country, and they did not mention having any desire to settle and live in the U.S. to get more freedom or to be saved. For example, no participant in the first case, who experienced living in a liberal Western country like the U.S. and who witnessed how American women have freedom and control over their bodies, sexuality, and lives, expressed a desire to settle and work in the U.S. after finishing her degree in order to have more freedom. Participants in the first case reported that going back to Saudi Arabia after finishing their degrees and having an academic job at a Saudi university to give back and have a role in society was one of their main goals. Even Noof, who lived her childhood in the U.S. and who was very excited to get her degree in the U.S., expressed her honor and her love to her homeland and to her family. These participants did not see themselves as inferior to

American women, and they did not express a desire to emulate them. Instead, some participants indicated that they tried to be ambassadors of their country and had the responsibility to correct misconceptions about Saudi and Muslim women. Some participants even expressed having more freedom in their Saudi country.

On the other hand, the participants in the second case, who studied at Saudi universities, mentioned that they would have preferred to get their graduate degrees abroad, but because of familial circumstances, such as having a large family, they could not study abroad. When I asked these participants about why they would prefer studying abroad in a country like the U.S., I got answers similar to this: “I don’t think that anyone who had a bachelor’s degree in the English language wouldn’t wish to study MA abroad for two reasons: first to improve her language and second to be exposed to a better education” (June 9, 2018). The reasons for studying abroad in a Western English-speaking country, for these Saudi females, was to improve their English, to get a better education, to enjoy more academic resources, and to be exposed to a different culture. No participant in this study indicated that she preferred to study abroad to have more freedom and human rights. None of the participants in this study expressed a rebellion against the conservative or modernized culture of their cities or families in Saudi Arabia. The participants in this study made confident statements that showed that they honor their values and beliefs and that they do not think of themselves as inferior to women in the West or as oppressed and in need of being saved.

Maintaining Saudi Cultural and Muslim Identity

Postcolonial feminists have argued that White mainstream feminists of the second wave ignored the effects of Western imperialism and colonialism on women in Third World

countries (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Mohanty, 1988). These White feminists did not acknowledge how colonialism affected gender roles and caused poverty and violence in these countries that were colonized. However, Saudi Arabia has not been colonized. Nevertheless, after the discovery of oil in the 1970s and the increase of American presence in the country, Saudi people were resistant to cultural and linguistic imperialism. This resistance increased after the Islamic Revival movement in 1979 (Yamani, 1996). While American women were able to drive cars and wear what they wanted, in Saudi Arabia women were veiled in black and segregated by gender to show their national identity and national distinction (Saudization), and also to show Islamic identity (Le Renard, 2014).

However, as mentioned in Chapter 2, one of the challenges that the recent young generation of Saudis face is keeping the balance between maintaining traditions and dealing with the demands for a changing, globalized world. The country has two ambitions: (1) it wants to be a developed country, and it is seeking modern education and international academic standards, exposing Saudi students to education and diverse cultures abroad and taking steps to be technologically, scientifically, and socially advanced; and (2) it is trying to stand for its religious and cultural values and trying to promote national and cultural identity among its people (Osnman, 2011; Pavan, 2013; Profanter, 2014). Given the political, social, religious, and cultural context of Saudi Arabia that I have discussed throughout the literature review in Chapter 2, as well as the rapid changes that have taken place in the last few years, it is apparent that the new Saudi generation, including the participants in this study, is struggling with tension between modernity and traditions. In the following section, I will discuss some aspects that emerged from the data and that showed the struggle of the participants to resist U.S linguistic and cultural imperialism, and to maintain their cultural

and Muslim identity while progressing and seeking modernity. I define U.S. linguistic imperialism as the domination/increasing power and influence of the English language in Saudi Arabia, sometimes even overpowering the Arabic language. In other words, English imperialism takes place when the English language starts to detract from the status of Arabic in Saudi Arabia, and when families prioritize the acquisition of English by children, even at the expense of acquiring the Arabic language. In addition, in this study I define U.S. cultural imperialism as follows: It is a form of (psychological) colonization (without military intervention), in which U.S. White feminism demeans and ridicules the views and practices of women in Saudi Arabia, attempting to impose its values and beliefs regarding women's freedom and gender roles on women in Saudi Arabia. Pressuring the idea that wearing the veil and gender segregation are signs of oppression and male domination for all Saudi women is, I think, a form of cultural imperialism.

English language. While the study participants indicated that they had to improve their English fluency and use it in their everyday lives, as it is the language of their profession, they also mentioned the importance of the Arabic language and the importance of teaching Arabic to their children. For example, one of the participants in the first case described the challenge she had to face when she was teaching her three children the Arabic language and Islamic studies in the U.S. She believed that while English is the language of globalization, Arabic is the language that represents her Arabic and Muslim identities. In addition, many participants in the second case mentioned that they were careful to teach their children both English and Arabic (standard Arabic) because, as Mohra mentioned, children have the ability to acquire more than one language **when they are young**. Some of these participants enrolled their children in Saudi private bilingual schools, and others depended on

themselves to teach their children the two languages at home. Only one participant, Nadia, indicated that she did not teach her children English until they started to be exposed to English language education in their Saudi public school. (Currently, English is introduced to students in the fourth grade.) Nadia wanted to give her children the choice and let them decide if they would like to be fluent English speakers or not. Although the participants indicated that they do not think their children's Arabic language is influenced by English, Shahad (a single participant) was concerned when she shared that she noticed the new generation of children is using English more than Arabic.

By having the ability to speak English, the participants in this study felt they could help bridge the two cultures and make their voices heard. For instance, the participants in the first case used English not only to earn a degree but also to increase awareness about Saudi and Muslim women by clearing up some misconceptions. In addition, one participant in the second case mentioned that English can help promote an intellectual network in which Saudi and other international researchers can learn from each other. Ohood stated: "English language can help me as a Saudi researcher to publish my research about Saudi dialects so it can be read by other international linguists abroad (E)" (July 4, 2018).

Veil and gender segregation. Maintaining Saudi Muslim and cultural identity was very obvious in the first case where the participants lived a few years in the United States. In the first case, the veil was an identifier of the participants' Islamic identity in American society, which imposed a difficulty on some of them; however, no participant completely took off her veil, and no participant tried to hide her religious identity. In addition, even being away from Saudi Arabian geographical boundaries and outside the walls of Saudi buildings separating males and females, *all* the Saudi participants in this case described

remaining separated by gender when meeting their Saudi friends outside classrooms in the host country.

Gender roles. As mentioned in the literature review, while the older generations of Saudi women fulfilled the roles of wives and mothers, the current generation is trying to have active roles in society in addition to being mothers and wives. The factors that have changed the attitudes toward gender roles include: the rapid increase of education that created the gap between Saudi women and their mothers; the growing number of Saudi students who have scholarships to study; the increasing enrollment of women in different fields of employment; and the access to mass media, TV, and the Internet (Yamany, 1996). This gap between mothers and daughters and the change of gender roles are seen in the data of both cases. For instance, three participants in the study mentioned having an educated father who pursued higher education and who helped them learn English in childhood, but no participant mentioned having a working or highly educated mother. Mohra, for instance, stated that her mother studied until middle school, but her father had a graduate degree abroad. Most of the participants' mothers (9 out of ten) had a degree less than a bachelor's degree (see Table 4.3.in Chapter 4 and Table 5.3. in Chapter 5). On the other hand, all the participants, despite their unique experiences, shared one goal: pursuing a master's degree and having an academic job at a Saudi university. Most of the participants are currently lecturers at Saudi universities, in addition to being mothers and wives. Despite this change of attitude toward gender roles, men were still seen as the breadwinners; they are responsible for their family's financial security even if the women are wealthy or have an income from a job. Three participants in the study clearly stated that they are "not responsible for financially supporting the family. It is the husband's responsibility." The education and the income

earned from their job is for the participant's personal benefit. Thus, the dynamics of gender roles in Saudi Arabia and how they have been changing through history was ignored by Western feminists who always assumed that Saudi women had no role in their society.

Recent Saudi reforms. The rapid and extensive social, political, and economic reforms that Saudi Arabia witnessed in the last two years to achieve its Saudi 2030 vision have created not only opportunities but also concerns. (These reforms were discussed in the literature review, Chapter 2.) These reforms included: lifting the ban on female driving, allowing women to drive cars and motorcycles, eliminating the authority of the male guardian, eliminating the authority of religious police, giving women the choice to wear the veil, increasing women's participation in the workforce, giving many Saudi women important positions in the government, reopening movie theaters, and allowing gender-mixed events in major cities.

When I asked the participants about their attitudes toward the dramatic changes that took place recently, they mentioned that they generally agree with these reforms; however, most of the participants followed their agreement with a statement that showed their concern about being Westernized and losing their Saudi cultural and Muslim identity (see Table 6.2.). They wanted the changes to be within the boundaries of Islamic law so they would not lose their values and beliefs. Moderation for them meant avoiding following radical interpretations of Islam and progressing without assimilating to the West. In addition, some participants indicated that these reforms are late because the rights these reforms give women are already given to them by Islam. Another participant believed that most of the reforms are not empowering all Saudi women; another participant stated that Saudi women still need more reforms.

Making the veil optional and removing the guardian authority are two reforms that all the participants agreed with. Although the majority of the participants are veiled (nine out of ten), they agreed on making the veil optional because they believed that wearing the veil is a religious practice that cannot be imposed on women; it is a choice. In addition, despite that most of the participants described a very positive relationship with their guardians who supported them, they agreed on removing the authority of the guardian because, as Hoda stated, “Not every single male is qualified to be responsible for his family or his female relative” (June 9, 2018). They knew that not all women are lucky like them to have a supportive and loving guardian; Mohra was an example of a Saudi woman who did not have a supportive guardian during her master’s degree in Riyadh.

Table 6.2.

Participants’ Attitudes Toward the Reforms of the Saudi 2030 Vision

First Case	Second Case
I agree with the reforms as long as they are within the Islamic law. I agree with these recent reforms, especially those that give women active roles in the society. However, all these rights were already given to women by Islam. I think we still need more reforms.	I am happy with the reforms they made. However, these reforms are very late. Actually, Islam has given us all our rights before these reforms took place. Our struggle is the struggle between the two extremes. Some people think that progress is a whole package that should be taken from the West with no filters, and those people who want to change the society to a Western society are the ones who give the chance to the extremely conservative people to argue and resist any kind of change. If we did not appreciate our own identity, no one will respect us.
I agree with the reforms; I feel they gave women more chances.	We want the change but it has to be within the limits. The change was rapid and stressful. We don’t want to move from one extreme to another. We want moderation.
I agree with the reforms, but I have some concerns. I am afraid that these changes, will encourage some individuals to act against our society’s traditions and customs.	I strongly agree with the reforms. However, we don’t want to lose our values. I always tell my students: “Be strong, learn, and achieve your dreams, but you have to keep your values and beliefs. The tree grows and changes its leaves but it does not change its roots.”
I like the reforms, but we still need more reforms.	The reforms are not empowering all Saudi women, only empowering a few individual ladies who were specifically chosen.

Concluding Thoughts

By using postcolonial feminist theory as a lens of analysis, this study gives the reader a chance to see the educational experiences of ten Saudi female graduates from a different angle. Moursi (2018) stated: “With this inferiority and marginalization, Saudi female graduates, especially those who come from Saudi public universities, are more likely to be unprepared for the requirements of the 21st century” (p. 39). While most of the existing literature on Saudi women has portrayed them as voiceless victims who are raised to be submissive to men and not prepared for the requirements of the 21st century, the participants in this study challenged this widespread view and proved that they are strong women who are able to face the challenges they had during their journeys and succeed. They are aware of their rights that Islam gives them. The participants provided confident statements that showed their faith in their abilities and their religion. Ohood stated:

Saudi women are strong; they were able to prove themselves. In the past, Saudi society was male oriented, and the main goal for most of Saudi women was to be good wives and good mothers. Today, Saudi women are moving forward to fully participate in the society. Saudi women have strong will and insistence. (July 4, 2018)

While the participants were trying to maintain their Muslim and cultural identity, they also showed their desire to clear up misconceptions and build a new understanding between the cultures of Saudi Arabia and the United States. In addition, although they were critical about their Saudi education and some Saudi cultural practices, they also showed faith in their country and hope for a brighter future. Al-Seghayer (2015b) stated:

Our country is tiptoeing along its way to progress for women, and the road is still long. Change is on the way, but it takes time, especially considering we are still a young country (85 years old). It took Susan B. Anthony and other American women longer to gain certain rights for themselves, including the right to vote, which was won only after the United States was already 144 years old. (p. 50)

By combining qualitative research and postcolonial feminist theory, along with detailed literature on Saudi Arabian history, this study tried to understand the educational experiences of these ten participants and to show that they had their own strengths and needs.

Conclusion

After reporting the findings of each case of this study separately in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, this chapter provided a comparison between the two cases. The goal of this comparison is to give the reader a broader picture of both cases. Then, the chapter presented an analysis of both cases from a postcolonial feminist perspective. In this analysis, I tried to connect the findings of the two cases with the theory and the literature review that guided this research. The next chapter concludes this study by providing some recommendations and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This study's findings have recommendations for empowering Saudi female graduate students and enhancing their academic success in higher education both in Saudi Arabia and in the United States. This final chapter provides recommendations for: American educational institutions that host Saudi female students, the pre-departure orientation in Saudi Arabia, Saudi graduate English programs, and future Saudi students who want to pursue a graduate English degree in the U.S. or Saudi Arabia. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and concludes with suggestions for future research.

Recommendations

As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, there is a lack of literature on Saudi female graduate students' educational experiences in both Saudi Arabia and the United States. Although there is significant research about international students studying in the United States, few scholars have addressed the experiences of Saudi female students studying abroad (Alhazmi, 2010, Alqefari, 2015; Shaw, 2009). In addition, although there is a significant number of Saudi females studying in Saudi graduate programs in Saudi Arabia, there has been very little research on their educational experiences. This study adds Saudi females' voices to the current literature and has the potential to improve their educational experiences by offering some recommendations regarding their pursuit of higher education in both Saudi Arabia and the United States. This study has recommendations for: (a) American universities, English language programs, and international students' services; (b) the pre-departure orientation in Saudi Arabia; (c) women's graduate English programs in Saudi Arabia; and (d)

future Saudi students who want to pursue a graduate English degree in the U.S. or Saudi Arabia.

Recommendations for Universities, English Language Programs, and International Students' Services in the United States

American universities have opened their doors to international students from all over the world, including Saudi female students who study in the U.S. in significant numbers. Therefore, instructors, or any person in a position of mentoring Saudi female students, should be aware of these students' academic, cultural, and religious needs. Saudi female students have a unique cultural identity that makes them different from other international students, and their hijab (if they are veiled) makes them a visible minority in American classrooms. The findings of the first case of this study can help American administrators and educators who work with Saudi female students in universities, language programs, and international students' services identify the challenges potentially faced by Saudi female students in the United States.

English language programs. All the Saudi participants in the first case of this study started their academic journeys in the U.S. by attending English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Therefore, these intensive English programs have a crucial role in preparing Saudi female students linguistically and academically. Linguistically, the participants in this study described their need to improve their English proficiency even though they had a Bachelor's degree in English from Saudi Arabia. ESL programs can help Saudi females improve their communication skills and pass the English proficiency tests (IELTS/TOEFL). Providing Saudi female students with female, native English speaking conversation partners can help improve their English conversation skills and also increase cultural understanding between

American and Saudi students. Academically, as highlighted by the participants, many Saudi students come to the U.S. without being prepared for American graduate courses, which depend on student-centered approaches. So, language programs can also familiarize Saudi students with the American education system and introduce them to American teaching strategies, different assessment methods, and academic writing skills. Exposing Saudi students to American educational contexts and teaching them basic academic writing skills can help them learn new study skills, other than memorizing, and ease their transition into American universities. In addition, U.S. universities can also provide instructors who teach or advise Saudi female students with workshops to help them be culturally sensitive during instruction and interaction with these students. Incorporating the findings of the first case in this study to design workshops or online training for instructors can increase their cultural awareness, enrich their teaching pedagogies, and create more positive multicultural learning environments.

Instructors. Instructors should be aware that these Saudi female students come from a society that is separated by gender. As reported by the participants in the first case, some Saudi students may have a feeling of discomfort dealing directly with Saudi males in pairs or in small group activities. Also, classroom activities that include physical touching with the opposite sex, like shaking hands or giving a high-five, may also be embarrassing for Saudi female students. As mentioned in the findings of the first case, some Saudi participants appreciated that some of their teachers had an awareness of their reluctance to shake hands with males or to be in groups with Saudi males. Therefore, instructors should consider this sensitivity for Saudi female students when assigning group activities in the classroom, especially if these students have just newly arrived to the host country. Moreover, having

one-on-one meetings to discuss classroom activities and instructional materials can provide Saudi female students with the chance to share with their instructors the difficulties they face and to reflect on their educational experiences. In addition, “it is better to see human beings as wholes rather than isolated minds, bodies, or souls” (Daloz, 2012, p.111). To improve Saudi females’ academic performance, instructors should be aware of their cultural, and educational background without being judgmental. Thus, instructors should not be influenced by stereotypes that claim Saudi female students are ignorant and oppressed in their home country. Instead of assuming oppression or lack of agency, instructors can give their Saudi students linguistic and intellectual space in the classroom— classrooms that encourage cultural exchange.

International students’ services. International students’ services can offer Saudi female students an orientation before starting their academic journey. Many participants in the first case stated that the orientation they had when they arrived in the host country was very helpful. In addition to U.S. immigration regulations and rules, the orientation can cover important information about the university’s resources and services, and how to register for courses and use the Blackboard online system. Furthermore, universities can celebrate culture and diversity, such as having an International Day festival, to develop intercultural understanding about Saudi women and other international students. When doing so, they can provide Saudi females a private room where men are not present and where they can introduce themselves, their culture, and their female Saudi community in a pro-cultural setting, e.g., no men would be allowed.

Recommendations for the Pre-departure Orientation in Saudi Arabia

Based on the findings of the first case of this study, the pre-departure orientation provided by the Saudi Cultural Mission for Saudi students who are awarded a scholarship to study at American universities can be improved. Currently, this three-day orientation aims to prepare students to have a successful educational experience in the United States. However, “the orientation sessions primarily preach religious discourse, emphasizing religious matters at the expense of addressing critical academic and cultural issues” (Al-Seghayer, 2015b, p. 12). In this orientation, nothing specifically addresses Saudi female students, who have different and unique experiences than males.

Therefore, this orientation can be updated and improved by acknowledging the possible difficulties that these students may face and prepare them for the necessary adjustments or compromises they will have to make. For example, the orientation can focus on some of the challenges that Saudi females may have, such as studying in co-educational classes and dealing with discrimination and negative or inappropriate comments. The orientation can also facilitate success by advising students on how to overcome these challenges, how to be open and establish a network of relationships with educators and friends in their fields, and how to familiarize themselves with the resources and services provided by the host universities.

This orientation can also give students a realistic view of American classroom culture and describe how studying in the United States is different from studying in Saudi Arabia. A series of workshops on active learning, participation, presentations, and study skills can help prepare Saudi students for studying in the U.S. In addition, the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) requires that scholarship recipients pass the English proficiency test and be

admitted to a U.S. university within 18 months. However, it would be helpful that students pass advanced level English before they travel to the United States.

Finally, the three-day orientation sessions are gender-segregated: women in one room and men in a separate room. These sessions are delivered by male speakers. (Women see the male speakers via TV.) Instead, I recommend that the orientation for females be delivered by female speakers who implement interactive activities to engage students. Also, they can invite some Saudi female graduates who obtained their graduate degrees from the U.S. to share their positive experiences and how they were able to overcome the challenges they faced. Inviting successful Saudi female graduates to share their experiences can motivate these female scholarship recipients and increase their awareness of the host culture and its education system.

Recommendations for Saudi Women's Graduate English Programs in Saudi Arabia

To reduce its dependence on oil and establish a knowledge-based economy, Saudi Arabia has invested billions of dollars to improve its higher education sector (Faruk, 2014a; Onsmann, 2011). However, many serious reforms still have to be implemented in Saudi universities, and especially in graduate studies programs. Saudi Arabia is the home of many prestigious universities that have offered advanced graduate studies and that are considered among the most technologically advanced universities in the world, such as Nora Bint Abdul Rahman University (the largest female-only university in the world), King Abdullah University for Science and Technology, and King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals (which opened its doors for female students in 2018). However, not all Saudi females have the chance to enroll in these prestigious universities. There are many Saudi universities offering graduate degrees that need tremendous reforms. Although the three

universities that granted the second case study participants their degrees are not representative of all Saudi universities, I, and many other Saudi scholars, argue that reforms must be undertaken to reexamine and update graduate programs in many Saudi universities. Therefore, in this section I present some recommendations for Saudi women's graduate programs based on the findings from the second case of this study.

To support Saudi female graduate students, it is very important to: provide a supportive system with a well-structured graduate plan; offer effective coursework, including research methodology courses; and hire qualified instructors, advisors, English writing tutors, and librarians. First, female graduate English programs should consider revising the plan of their master's program. All the participants in the second case reported that they had to follow a fixed plan of required courses for obtaining a master's degree. The participants did not have a chance to take elective courses based on their research interests. In addition, all the participants took only one research methodology course, and according to these participants, this course was not enough to prepare them to conduct research. Therefore, I suggest that female graduate English programs in Saudi Arabia revise their plans to include a set of elective courses and more research courses because all of these students have to conduct research for their thesis and most of them lack research and critical thinking skills. In doing so, students will have an active role in planning their academic experience, and they will learn the practical aspects of conducting academic research, which is one of the important skills graduate students must have.

Second, female graduate English programs should provide students with qualified instructors because instructors play a central role in students' academic success. As highlighted by Ohood and Hoda (the only two participants who were exposed to student-

centered pedagogies in Saudi Arabia), Saudi instructors who studied abroad provided them with the instructional and academic support that they needed. Many Saudi graduates who earn their PhDs abroad struggle to have academic positions at Saudi universities (Qashqari, 2017). Thus, it is very important for Saudi colleges and universities to create job opportunities for qualified university graduates on the one hand, and to benefit from their qualifications and expertise to enhance course offerings and innovative teaching strategies that promote students' success on the other hand. In addition, graduate English programs should provide professional development for their current instructors and advisors on designing curriculum and using teaching pedagogies that promote interactive and collaborative learning, critical thinking, and effective communication. Instructors need to be aware that traditional rote teaching deprives students of developing critical, analytical, and innovative thinking skills. "Critical thinking is a liberating force in education and often produces students who are well-informed, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in dealing with personal bias, and prudent in judgment making" (Al-Seghayer, 2015b, p. 24).

Third, female graduate English programs should revise their academic advising policies. Ineffective academic advising was one of the biggest challenges that most of the participants who studied at Saudi universities faced. Women's graduate English programs should provide enough qualified academic advisors, especially female advisors. Considering the gender segregation of Saudi society, some Saudi females may prefer to have female advisors in order to communicate face-to-face. In addition, according to the participants who studied at domestic Saudi universities, waiting until students finished their coursework before providing them with academic advisors resulted in a waste of time and effort. It is very

important for graduate students to have an academic advisor from the beginning of their journey to establish an effective mentoring relationship with clear objectives. Moreover, it is crucial for Saudi female students to be given the chance to choose academic advisors whom they feel comfortable working with. Giving graduate students the chance to choose their advisors can enhance students' learning experiences. Also, female graduate English programs should provide mentoring training for academic advisors to increase their awareness about the importance of effective communication with students. Also, the training can draw the advisors' attention to the importance of giving students constructive feedback to improve their academic performance. Advisors should be aware of their students' academic strengths and weaknesses. They should keep the balance between providing their students with supportive guidance and challenging them to be independent learners (Daloz, 2012). Instead of having hierarchical relationships with students, Saudi teachers and advisors could promote horizontal relationships in which instructors and students listen to each other, generate ideas, and pay attention to each other's concerns. "Saudi professors should be warm, open, available, predictable, and highly student-oriented" (Al-Seghayer, 2015b, p. 21). This kind of relationship can also be possible with male advisors, even if the communication is by email or telephone. But that may take a special kind of mentoring training. Fostering this instructor-student relationship in Saudi universities and colleges can enhance the learning experience and increase the quality of Saudi education.

Finally, Saudi female graduate English programs should provide services and resources that are important for pursuing graduate studies. As findings indicated, all the participants in the second case reported in different ways the lack of academic resources and services. For example, the library is the heart of any university campus. It should offer

students up-to-date references (electronic and traditional), provide students with quiet places for studying, and offer services by expert librarians and staff members. In addition, providing an English writing center with tutors would help Saudi female students who struggle with academic writing. Also, English graduate programs should offer workshops on conducting research, citing references, writing literature reviews, and the thesis writing process. All these workshops would help students improve their academic skills. Moreover, graduate programs should take into consideration that most graduate classes start late in the afternoon, as reported by the participants. As a result, the library, computer labs, and other university resources should be open in the evening to be available for graduate students who can't come to the campus in the morning³.

Another suggestion for female English graduate programs is to offer students an orientation before starting their degree program. In this study, no participants who graduated from Saudi universities had an orientation that introduced their program. As mentioned in the second case, some participants were not aware of the services provided by the Saudi Digital Library, and they did not know how to use it. Therefore, having an orientation can inform students about services provided by the university and, more importantly, provide students with important information about their program plan and advisement policies. A final recommendation is to provide Saudi females in English graduate programs with the opportunity to communicate (online) with female native English speakers. Saudi universities could coordinate with American universities, or any English-speaking universities abroad, to provide Saudi students at domestic universities with formal and safe ways to communicate

³ For example, the hours that Zimmerman Library at the University of New Mexico keeps during the Spring 2019 are as follows: Monday- Thursday: 7am - 2am, Friday: 7am - 9pm, Saturday: 10am-6pm, and Sunday: Noon-2am.

with English conversation partners. In doing so, these Saudi students would be able to not only improve their English communication skills, but also have an intercultural interaction experience.

Recommendations for Future Saudi Female Students

Recommendations for Saudi females studying at American universities. Future students must be familiar with both the possible difficulties and the opportunities they will face in the United States. It is not enough to check the crime rates and the weather of the state where they will go; it is important to read about other Saudi female experiences to be familiar with and ready to face possible challenges. Having resilience and intercultural competence are vital for academic success abroad. The following list provides some recommendations for future Saudi female students who want to pursue a degree in the United States:

- Improve your English and try to pass the IELTS or TOEFL test before you go to the United States because, according to the new Saudi scholarship requirements, a student must be admitted to a U.S. university in one year or he/she will lose the scholarship.
- Set your goals, manage your time, be self-dependent, be self-confident, and have faith in your abilities.
- Familiarize yourself with and use all of the available resources and services provided by the host university.
- Be open to socialize with people from different cultures and expand your networks of relationships. Try to clear up misconceptions about Muslim and Saudi women.
- Be curious about U.S. customs, practices and values. Ask questions and learn as much as you can while you are in the U.S., not just about your graduate program,

but about the country you are studying in and the people who call this their home.

In addition to educating U.S. citizens about your culture and practices and religion, be curious and inquisitive about U.S. culture, values, and diverse Christian or Jewish faiths. Try to expand your horizon, and do not assume that simply by living a few years in the U.S. you understand the thinking and the priorities and values of a country as diverse as the U.S.

- Expect to be in mixed-gender classrooms and other settings (restaurants, stores, etc.) and be ready to interact with men, Saudi and non-Saudi. To not do so will be seen in the U.S. as unfriendly and isolating yourself. Also, understand in your everyday life in the U.S. that males on campus and off will not necessarily be aware that Saudi women do not want to be touched by a man. If a woman is inadvertently touched, do not consider it disrespectful ignorance on the U.S. man's part.

Recommendations for Saudi females studying at Saudi universities. Future students should be familiar with the possible difficulties and opportunities they will face when they pursue a graduate degree at a domestic university. It is helpful to read about other Saudi female experiences to be familiar with and ready to face possible challenges. Having resiliency is crucial for students' progress. In addition, the following list provides some recommendations for future Saudi female students who want to pursue a graduate degree in Saudi Arabia:

- Set your goals, manage your time, be self-dependent, be self-confident, and have faith in your abilities.

- Be a self-directed learner. Rely on yourself to direct your learning experience. For example, you can improve your English language skills and your academic skills by using free instructional materials on the Internet. Look at other students' theses to learn how to write a literature review, cite resources, and design a research study.
- Establish a good relationship with your academic advisor and set clear guidelines and expectations from the beginning. Try to agree on regular meetings (face-to-face or by phone) with your advisor to discuss your work and to get feedback.
- Expand your networks of professional contacts. Be proactive and approach your instructors whenever you need their assistance.
- Familiarize yourself with and use all the available resources provided by your university.

Limitations of This Study

This study is a multi-case study that is localized and contextualized. It only represents the voices of ten Saudi participants who studied at specific universities in two different international contexts: Saudi Arabia and the United States. These ten participants were from the same generation, and they shared many cultural, religious, and socioeconomic characteristics. Thus, they cannot be a representative sample of all diverse Saudi female graduates in either international context.

Also, the participants in the first case who graduated from American universities described different experiences depending on the population of Saudi students enrolled in their universities (the participants who studied at American universities that hosted a large number of Saudi students reported more positive experiences than the participants who

studied at universities with a smaller number of Saudi students and which lacked awareness of Saudi culture). However, the participants' experiences may have been affected by the number of Saudi students enrolled specifically in their programs. This study did not investigate this question.

In addition, while the five participants in the first case graduated from five different universities in five different states in the U.S., the five participants in the second case graduated from only three different universities in Saudi Arabia. These three Saudi universities cannot be representative of all Saudi universities. Unfortunately, I did not have access to five participants who graduated from five different universities in Saudi Arabia. However, having three participants who graduated from the same university in the city of Taif gave me the chance to see how the graduate English program in that university was improving.

Another limitation of this study is the use of translation. As mentioned in Chapter 3, when I conducted the interviews, I gave the participants the chance to use the language that would express their thoughts, perspectives, and experiences most effectively. As a result, most of the interviews (seven out of ten) were conducted in Arabic (with heavy code-switching between Arabic and English). Thus I had to translate most of the participants' quotes that were cited in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Moreover, one of the data collection methods in this study was gathering and analyzing documents from the participants. I asked each participant to provide me with the letter of intent that she used when applying for her master's degree, or to write a document that included her goals for the master's degree if she did not have a letter of intent. However, I received documents from only three participants out of ten. I sent three reminders to the

participants, but I received nothing more. Having only three documents from the participants did not generate rich information compared with the data I had from conducting the interviews.

Throughout the process of analyzing the data, I used member checking by asking the participants for clarification and by asking for feedback from them about the data and the emerging findings. However, realizing that the participants have busy lives (most of them are mothers and fulltime lecturers or teachers), I preferred not to burden them with additional questions and requests. Therefore, I did not send all the participants the quotes that I translated and cited in this study, which would have increased the validity of the translation. Also, I did not want to send more than three reminders to ask the participants for documents to analyze. I have very positive relationships with the participants, and I did not want to exploit their time or have them regret participating in this study.

The last limitation is having conducted four interviews over the phone. I preferred to conduct all the interviews face-to-face. However, one participant lived in Abha, which was far away from the city where I live (Dammam), and three other participants preferred having the interview by phone because they were too busy to meet. Yet, I believe these phone interviews were as effective and productive (generated rich data) as face-to-face interviews.

Future Research

Given that there is a lack of literature on the educational experiences of Saudi female students in graduate programs at American and Saudi universities, future research about this topic is needed. Accordingly, I have some recommendations for future research. First, in the field of English language learning, this study did not aim to assess the participants' English proficiency. So, I recommend that further research be conducted to see how the difficulties

faced by the Saudi participants in both cases affected their English proficiency, or on the other hand, how their proficiency in English influenced the difficulties and challenges and opportunities they encountered. Researchers could examine the different factors that may affect English proficiency, such as motherhood, studying in major or conservative cities in Saudi Arabia, studying at U.S. universities or in specific academic departments that have a large or small population of Saudi students, etc. All of these factors may have an impact on Saudi females' English proficiency. In addition, further research is needed to assess graduate English programs at different Saudi universities to improve and foster learning.

Second, in the field of women's studies, it is important to conduct further research on Saudi women from postcolonial feminist perspectives, especially because most of the existing literature is conducted from a Western feminist viewpoint (White mainstream feminism), which misrepresents Saudi women. This study examined the experiences of ten Saudi middle-class women (Sunni Muslims). Therefore, this study could be replicated to examine the experiences and the perceptions of Saudi women from different socioeconomic classes and who follow different sects of Islam. Also, this study did not examine the issue of ethnic differences among the participants and the effects of such differences on their educational experiences. Therefore, researchers could examine the educational experiences of Saudi women from different ethnic groups. In addition, this study examined the experiences of Saudi women whose ages ranged between 28 and 35. All of them were born in the 1980s and shared similar Saudi educational, political and economic systems. Thus, this study could be replicated to include Saudi women from different generations to see their different views and their interpretations of their experiences. It would also be interesting to study older women's (mothers') views of their daughters' advanced schooling: do they

support their daughters' new professional roles? What are their thoughts as they are called upon to provide more grandchild care while their daughters work outside the home, etc.? Also, this study could be replicated after 2030 (as Saudi society changes to achieve the Saudi 2030 vision) to examine the impact of social, cultural, and economic transformations of Saudi society on the Saudi women's views of gender roles, veil, and gender segregation.

Third, there is a growing body of literature on mentoring in the field of education. Thus, scholars interested in mentoring in education could examine the mentoring relationship between Saudi male teacher/advisors and Saudi female students. Having an effective mentoring relationship between male mentors and female mentees in Saudi universities that are separated by gender should be examined. Research on mentoring in Saudi Arabia could provide new insights for creating more effective communication between male mentors and female mentees in line with Saudi culture and traditions.

Finally, more research could be conducted to examine King Abdullah's Scholarship Program (KASP) to identify its strengths, its weaknesses, and its effects on Saudi society. "The current scholarship program lacks a pre-scholarship plan, plans for during the scholarship period, and a post-scholarship plan that considers what to do with Saudi students upon their return home equipped with state-of-the-art knowledge" (Al-Seghayer, 2015b, p. 12). Thus, researchers could further examine this program to identify ways to improve it in the three phases mentioned by Al-Seghayer (2015b).

Also, further research could examine Saudi female experiences after finishing their degrees and returning to Saudi Arabia and what roles they can play in the development of the country. In addition, research could be done on Saudi children who accompanied their mothers, who studied abroad, to examine the effects of living abroad on these children.

Moreover, research could be done to study the experiences of guardians (husbands, fathers, brothers) who accompany the Saudi women scholars. Researchers could address the following questions: What are the guardians' views, as they probably take over more child-care responsibilities in the home? How do they support their wives' educational goals while still maintaining their cultural identity? What does their support at home look like, and how do they see their wives' increasing educational and linguistic development?

Closing Thoughts

In conclusion, this multi-case study examined the educational experiences of two groups of Saudi females: those who graduated with a master's degree in an English-related field from American universities and those who graduated with a master's degree in an English-related field from Saudi universities. With the lack of literature on the educational experiences of Saudi female graduates at both American universities and Saudi universities, I hope the findings of this study will contribute by bringing Saudi female graduate students' voices into the literature. In addition, by weaving together qualitative research with postcolonial feminist theory, and presenting a detailed literature review on Saudi Arabian history, I hope the findings of this study offer new ways for English educators and administrators to provide supportive academic assistance to Saudi female students to enhance their success in higher education in both countries. Also, with the huge cultural gap between Saudi Arabia and the U.S., I hope the findings of this study provide insights to build a new understanding between these two countries. While the dominant view of Saudi women portrays them as voiceless victims, the experiences of these ten Saudi female graduates show that women's experiences are far more complex and nuanced than to be classified as either

victims or survivors. In this globalized multicultural world, learners and educators need to have intercultural awareness to celebrate differences and to learn from each other.

Appendix A: Interview Questions (First Case- Saudi Females Who Have Graduated from U.S. Universities)

General questions:

- Which city in Saudi Arabia are you from originally?
- What was your major?
- Have you traveled outside Saudi Arabia and been exposed to different cultures before you came to the United States?
- Did you have any working experience before you came to the United States? If you had a working experience, what was your job? Did you have any interaction with men? Did you use English as a language of interaction in that job?

Goals for master's degree:

- How did you decide about studying abroad? why?
- What were your plans when you graduated? Have you achieved them?

The beginning of the educational experience in the United States:

- I would like to have you go back to a time in your personal life when you were first introduced to the idea of studying abroad. What did you imagine graduate study would be like?
- Tell me about the procedure you had to follow in order to get a full admission to the master's degree program. What were the obstacles that you had to overcome to be enrolled in the program?
- What was your first reaction when you arrived?
- In what ways were you satisfied with your education in the United States.? What did you like about studying in the United States?

Saudi education system and U.S. education system

- Do you think that Saudi students were prepared to study in the United States?
- Tell me about your transition from the Saudi education system to U.S. education system. How did you manage this transition?
- What differences did you notice between the two education systems?
- How did you react to discussions, presenting, and facilitating classes in the U.S classrooms?
- When you came to the United States and started your graduate program, did you have any skills in doing research, writing a literature review, giving feedback, thinking critically? How did you improve these skills?
- What was the role of your advisor? How did she/ he support you?
- What was the role of mentorship (GRC, Cap, library, librarians, writing camps, etc.) or any other facilities that were provided by your university in your academic journey?
- How was the student-teacher relationship in the U.S. different from Saudi Arabia? Did you feel that instructors in the United States were caring for students? How did that affect your education?
- What was the role of using technology in the classroom and in your assignments? (assignments must be typed, using research engines, using research software...etc.?)
- How did the pre-departure orientation provided by the Saudi Cultural Mission in Saudi Arabia help you when you came to the U.S? In your opinion, how can this orientation be improved?

- Suppose you could not come to the U.S., and you got your degree in Saudi Arabia, what would your experience be like?

Challenges: the role of culture, religion and gender

- What were the things that you did not like about studying in the United States?
- What were the challenges that you faced?
- How did you feel in co-education classes in the United States, and how was this different from classes in Saudi Arabia?
- What was the role of veil in your academic experience in the United States?
- As you know that Muslim women can't shake hands or hug men who are not their relatives. How did such religious and cultural practices affect your relationship with your male instructors? With male colleagues? Did you prefer a male or female instructor? why?
- What were the cultural obstacles that you have faced in your journey? How did you overcome them?
- How did the representation of Muslim women and Saudi women, specifically, in the Western media affect your education journey?
- Some people would say that Saudi women are oppressed, have no rights and no freedom. What would you tell them?
- What difficulties did you face as a female student that did not necessarily face your brother or husband who was studying in the United States?
- What was the role of Mahram (the guardian) in your experience in the U.S.? In what ways could the Mahram be important, unimportant, supportive or an obstacle in your education abroad?

- As you know, women did not drive in Saudi Arabia. Did that impose a difficulty on Saudi women studying abroad?
- Describe for me the various roles you had to play as a female student studying abroad?
- What were the values, beliefs, or views that have changed within you after having this experience of studying abroad?
- What is your attitude toward the social reforms (reforms that took place as part of the Saudi 2030 Vision) that took place recently?

The role of English language

- Tell me about your experience of passing the IELTS or TOFEL tests?
- Did you prefer conversational English or written English? In which way did you express yourself better?
- How did you improve your English?
- What were the barriers you faced as a second language learner? How did you overcome these barriers?
- Do you think that it is a good idea to have a limited time (six months) to pass the English proficiency test before Saudi students start their academic degrees in the United States?
- As an English speaker, do you think your voice can be heard? How has your master's in English helped you express your views to a wider population in the world?

Strategies for success:

- What strengths do you have as a Saudi woman and as a second language learner? What do you think are your weaknesses?

- What was the role of family/ extended family in your education?
- What role did your friendships play in your stay in the in the United States?
- How did you overcome the challenges you had while studying in the United States?
- What has studying abroad meant to you? What did you learn about yourself from this experience? How has it affected you academically and personally?

Recommendations

- In your opinion, how should Saudi Arabia prepare Saudi female students to study in the United States?
- From your experience, what advice can you give any Saudi female students who want to study for a master's degree in the English language in the United States?

Appendix B: Interview Questions (Second Case-Saudi Females Who Have Graduated from Saudi Universities)

General questions:

- Which city in Saudi Arabia are you from originally?
- What was your major?
- Have you traveled outside Saudi Arabia and been exposed to different cultures? Where and Which?
- Did you have any work experience before starting your MA classes? If yes, what was it? Did you use English as a language of interaction in this job?

Goals for master's degree:

- How did you decide to pursue a master's degree? why?
- What were your plans when you graduated? Have you achieved them?

The beginning of the educational experience in Saudi Arabia:

- I would like to have you go back to a time in your personal life when you were first introduced to the idea of pursuing the master's degree. What did you imagine graduate study would be like?
- Tell me about the procedure you had to follow in order to get a full admission to the master's degree program. What were the obstacles that you had to overcome to be enrolled in the program?
- Did you have an orientation at the beginning of your program? Did that orientation help you when you started your program? If so, how? If not, why not? In your opinion, how could this orientation be improved?

- In what ways were you satisfied with your education in Saudi Arabia? What did you like about studying in Saudi Arabia?

Saudi education system:

- Do you think that your Bachelor degree prepared you to pursue graduate studies? In your opinion, how should the Saudi education system prepare Saudi female students to pursue a graduate degree?
- Tell me about your transition from your Bachelor to graduate program in Saudi Arabia. How did you manage this transition?
- How did you feel in your graduate classes, and how was this different from classes you had in your undergraduate classes?
- Did you feel that you were an active learner in your classes? What types of activities were you exposed to in your classes?
- How did you react to discussions, presenting, and facilitating classes?
- When you started your graduate program, did you have any skills for doing research, writing a literature review, giving feedback, and thinking critically? How did you improve these skills?
- What was the role of your advisor? How did she/ he support you?
- What were the facilities that your campus provided for graduate students (workshops, library, writing camps, etc.)? What kind of support could you seek on your campus?
- Describe for me the student-teacher relationship in your classes? Did you feel that teachers were caring for students? How did that affect your education?
- What was the role of using technology in your classrooms and in your assignments? (assignments must be typed, using research engines, using research software...etc.)

Challenges: the role of culture, religion and gender

- What were the things that you did not like about studying in Saudi Arabia?
- What were the challenges that you faced?
- How did you interact with your male instructors? How was that different from having a female instructor? Which one did you prefer? why?
- In your opinion, what were the cultural or traditional practices that could be an obstacle in your academic advancement? How did you overcome them?
- In your opinion, how does the representation of Muslim women and specifically Saudi women in the Western media affect Saudi women's progress?
- Some people would say that Saudi women are oppressed, have no rights and no freedom. What would you tell them?
- What was the role of veil in your academic experience? What does the veil mean for you?
- What does freedom mean for you?
- What difficulties did you face as a female student, that did not necessarily face your brother or husband who is studying in Saudi Arabia?
- As you know, women did not drive in Saudi Arabia. Did that impose a difficulty on Saudi women pursuing a graduate degree?
- Describe for me the various roles you had to play as a female graduate student studying in Saudi Arabia?
- What were the values, beliefs, or views that have changed within you after having this experience?

- What is your attitude toward the social reforms (reforms that took place as part of the Saudi 2030 Vision) that took place recently?

The role of English language

- Tell me about your experience of passing the IELTS or TOFEL tests?
- Did you prefer conversational English or written English? In which way were you able to better express yourself? Why?
- How did you improve your English?
- What were the barriers you faced as a second language learner? How did you overcome these barriers?
- As an English speaker, do you think your voice can be heard? How has your master's in English helped you to express your views to a wider population in the world?

Strategies for success:

- What strengths do you have as a Saudi woman and as a second language learner? What do you think are your weaknesses?
- What was the role of family/ extended family in your education?
- What role did your friendships play in your academic journey?
- How did you overcome the challenges you had while studying for your master's degree?
- What did studying a graduate program mean to you? What did you learn about yourself from this experience? How has it affected you academically and personally?

Recommendations

- Suppose you had the opportunity to study abroad like in the U.S., what would your experience be like? If you had the chance, would you have preferred to study abroad?

- From your experience, what advice you can give any Saudi female students who want to study for a master's degree in the English language in Saudi Arabia?

Appendix C: Validity Matrix (Maxwell, 2013)

What Do I Need to Know?	Why I Need to Know This?	What Kind of Data Can Answer This Question	Analysis Plans	Validity Threats	Strategies for Dealing With Validity Threats
RQ: What are the experiences and the perceptions of two different groups of Saudi women: those who graduated with a master's degree in the English language from American universities, and Saudi universities?	We know little about the experiences of Saudi female students in higher education in the United States and Saudi Arabia. Although there is a significant number of Saudi females pursuing graduate degrees in both: Saudi Arabia and the U.S., only few scholars addressed their educational experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcribed interviews • Analyzed documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within-case analysis (Thematic analysis to analyze each case) • Cross-case analysis 	The researcher's bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being open and put aside my assumptions when analyzing and interpreting the data. • Letting themes emerged from the data, whether these themes were expected or surprising. • Triangulation of data • Member checking • Providing thick description • Using open ended questions that minimize the researcher's bias and give the chance to participants to discuss topics that may seem not important to the researcher
				Participant reactivity to the researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding leading questions • Using open ended questions, hypothetical questions, devil's advocate questions, ideal position questions, interpretive questions, probing questions and warm-up questions to generate rich information, and minimize the researcher's bias and influence
				Limitation of the time of this study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using a triangulation between interviews and documents • Using member-checking
				Translating quotes	
				The small sample size can't be representative of all Saudi female students in the United States and Saudi Arabia	

Appendix D: Saudi Women's Educational Experiences in Two International Contexts:

Saudi Arabia and the United States

Consent to Participate in Research

April, 2018

Purpose of the study: You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being done by Dr. Lois Meyer and Kholod Sendi, a PhD student, from the Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies. The purpose of this study is to examine the educational experiences of two groups of Saudi female students: those who have graduated with a master's degree in the English language from Saudi universities and those who have graduated with a master's degree in the English language from American universities. This study will explore the challenges these two groups have faced and the strategies they have used to succeed in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia and in the United States. You are being asked to take part in this study because you are either a Saudi female who has graduated with a master's degree in the English language (including English literature, linguistics, applied linguistics, educational linguistics) from American university or a Saudi female who has graduated with a master's degree in the English language (including English literature, linguistics, applied linguistics, educational linguistics) from Saudi university.

This form will explain what to expect when joining the research, as well as the possible risks and benefits of participation. If you have any questions, please ask the student researcher, Kholod Sendi: ksendi@unm.edu, (202) 390-5273 or

What you will do in the study:

- If you agree to participate, I will ask you for two interviews. Each interview should take no more than 60 minutes, but if you are willing to spend with me more time, I will appreciate it. We will agree upon a convenient time and location to interview you. The interview will be conducted in person, if possible, or if necessary by Skype, Facetime or telephone. You will be interviewed alone in private. You will be asked about your experience as a Saudi female student who has graduated with a master's degree in the English Language. I will ask you about the challenges that you faced and strategies that you used to succeed. You can skip any question that makes you uncomfortable and you can stop the interview at any time. The interview will be audiotaped if you give me the permission.
- Also, I will ask you to write a document (1-2 pages) that includes your statement of goals for the master's degree. If you can provide me with your letter of intent that you used to apply for your master's degree, that will serve as a document too. Providing this document is voluntary.

Participation in this study will take a total of two hours. The study will take place between May 2018, and May 2019.

Risks: There are very minimal risks of stress associated with participating in this research study. You may feel uncomfortable answering some questions during the interview.

However, you have the right to not answer or skip any question that makes you uncomfortable. Also, you can withdraw from the study at any time.

Benefits: There will be no benefit to you from participating in this study. However, it is hoped that information gained from this study will help future Saudi students who will study their master's degree in English in Saudi or American universities.

Confidentiality of your information: Data will be stored in my password-protected laptop computer. All physical data will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home. Your name will be omitted from the data before it is stored. Neither your name nor the name of the university that you have graduated from will be used in any published reports about this study. We will take measures to protect the security of all your personal information, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all study data. The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human subject research may be permitted to access your records.

Payment: You will not be paid for participating in this study.

Right to withdraw from the study: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any point in this study without penalty. If you decide not to participate, please call or email me. Any audio-recordings, transcripts or any data related to you will be deleted. Any documents you gave me will be returned to you when you withdraw.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research study, please contact:

Kholod Sendi, ksendi@unm.edu, (202) 390-5273 or

If you would like to speak with someone other than the research team to obtain information or offer input or if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB. The IRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving people:

UNM Office of the IRB, (505) 277-2644, irbmaincampus@unm.edu. Website: <http://irb.unm.edu/>

CONSENT

You are making a decision whether to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read this form (or the form was read to you) and that all questions have been answered to your satisfaction. By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

I agree to participate in this study.

Name of Adult Participant

Signature of Adult Participant

Date

Researcher Signature

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

Name of Research Team Member

Signature of Research Team Member

Date

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