

The Impact of Studying in the United States on Saudi Students' Identities

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Abstract

This paper reports on the findings of exploring how studying in the United States may impact international students, specifically Saudi students, and how this may affect their identities. The aim of this study is to analyze different types of identities and how each of the Ph.D. students modifies them depending on some factors. For the purpose of this study, ten Saudi Ph.D. students, who were teaching English in Saudi Arabia, took part in the oral interviews and the open-ended questionnaire, which consist of seven questions. Analysis of the data suggests that some factors such as religion, culture, traditions, and education impact Saudi students' identities and their children's, and how they are perceived by native speakers of the host country. The study shows the fact that mixed identity has the greatest impact on the students' self-perspective, and that all participants want their children to preserve their own religion, culture and traditions. Moreover, the study concludes with implications and recommendations in the field of language and identity.

Keywords: childhood, culture, identity, mixed-gender-class, religion, Saudi, traditions, US

1. Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, KSA, is considered the most important country in the Arabic and Islamic world. This importance comes from being the world's largest oil producer and having the world's largest proven oil reserves, and also from being the heart of the Islamic world according to the US department of energy, 2015. Its constitution is the Qur'an (the holy book of God in the Islamic faith). Saudi citizens are highly connected to their religion as Sharia law strongly influences their lives. It also governs their behaviors and culture. Saudi Arabia is a pivotal member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, OPEC, and the only Arabic-speaking country in the G20. According to research carried out by Euromonitor International in 2013, Saudi Arabia's population in 2017 is estimated to be about 30 million, including about 8 million foreign residents.

The official language in KSA is Arabic, but English is widely used as well, particularly in business and technology. KSA is a monolingual society moving towards bilingualism, as English is used as a lingua franca mostly in the private sector but very little in the public sector.

The Saudi government recognizes the significant and fundamental role of the English language around the world as the language of science and technology, as well as a main factor of modernization, in addition to the fact of being the language of prestige in multiple territories. The choice of English is primarily for instrumental purposes and is based on socioeconomic and political factors (Al-Seghayer, 2005). Moreover, English has obtained the status of the lingua franca worldwide depending on the number of its speakers. Therefore, the Saudi government has presented English as its only foreign language taught in public schools because of its close political and commercial relations with Western countries and the US.

Learning English has become a means for a successful career in virtually any field. Thus, investment has been made by the Saudi government to equip high school students with high skills in English, in order to obtain their desired aims. Lately, the Saudi government decided to send its citizens abroad to learn English and various fields of science in Europe and the United States as one of its major commitments to educate Saudi citizens. More precisely, the Saudi ministry of education, MoE, created scholarship programs to support students who are motivated to pursue their education, nationally and internationally in order to meet the needs of the labor market (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). The Saudi MoE (2016) stated that the number of Saudi students who are registered in scholarship programs peaked at its highest in 2013 with 148,000 students in 24 countries around the world.

Saudis who master English in Saudi Arabia are considered to be upper-class or elite in others' views. Since speaking English fluently proves the high level of education of those people, which gives them variable advantages in competing with others in the labor markets. Al-Nasser (2015) mentioned that English is the language of science, technology and business. This idea motivates some citizens to learn English, not only to become teachers of English but also to get high academic positions at Saudi universities. English teachers are specifically seen as the best English speakers by most people in KSA. Thus, those teachers may shape their identities upon this concept. However, if they move to a native English country, they may feel that they have some deficiencies in English. Since English is not highly taught and well-practiced in Saudi Arabia, learners still have obstacles in their educational journey. They really struggle to master English to be professional users of the language.

Identity, with its different forms, is believed that it could have the ability to shape L2 learners and the way they live. Many people still think

that English as a foreign language (EFL)/ English as a second language (ESL) learners have to get rid of their own culture and religion and adapt to the native speakers' standards, by changing their names and following the target language norms. In addition, research papers such as (Lobton, 2012) related to language and identity, are usually conducted in English language native speakers' settings, which show the language-learning process as a complex interplay.

This study investigates how Saudi Ph.D. students in English programs in the US, who already teach English in KSA, approach the issue of second language learning and change their identities as English learners, and fathers of English learners in US public schools. Ph.D. Students have chosen as this study intends to focus on Saudis that have good knowledge of the language and experience in teaching English.

In fact, different researchers analyzed the multidimensional natures of a learner's identity. Norton (2000) illustrated her participant 'Martina' who has multiple identities: as an immigrant, a mother, a language learner, a worker and a wife. As an immigrant, Martina did not feel comfortable speaking English, while her identity as a mother allowed her to engage in a long conversation with her landlord when he accused her of breaking a lease agreement. Moreover, different studies proved that learning a second language does not necessarily lead to abandoning the learner's ethnic identity. These studies also indicated that maintaining a person's ethnic identity is a successful way of learning a second language.

Bashir-Ali (2006) proved that 'Maria' adopted the common linguistics and social traits of African- Americans to gain entry into that group of classmates.

From this standpoint, this study tends to explore the perceptions of Saudi Ph.D. students in the US, in regard to their multiple identities as English learners (as long as they are seen as non-native speakers of English), and as parents of children who attend US public schools and learn English as a foreign language. The study mainly investigates how multiple identities' negotiations of those Saudis may be reflected in their journey towards learning English and their children as well. It also attempts to explore how these multiple identities may be resistant or flexible in both cases, as a learner/ a parent of a learner, to the process of English learning. This study also aims at investigating whether studying English in the United States, affects the religious and cultural identities of Saudis, as the English language is a global language and a lingua franca.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Identity

From its origin in the 1950s, it seems that identity has different meanings, and it is mainly hard to find a fixed definition for it (Block 2007; Parsons, 1964; Taylor, 1992). It has become a complex and varied issue since it depends on knowing one's self and how to interpret the self in a larger social setting.

Identity also relies on how others would see someone's actions and how he/ she interacts in social life (Hall, 1996). In the same vein, Duff (2012) defined it as "one's connection or identification with a particular social group, the emotional ties one has with a group, and the meanings that the connection has for an individual." In other words, individuals are impacted by both internal and external concerns that could construct their identities. It is attainable to determine the different types of identities such as personal, social, and professional identities. None of these identities is able to work alone, since each may affect the others. Although, some aspects of identity could be seen more clearly than others, depending on the different backgrounds of each person. History is very crucial and usually shapes the formulation of identity. Block (2007) summarized, in his study of individuals who lived in the UK that people's past and present interact and transform each other.

Accordingly, Saudi students who already have a different culture and religion from Americans will surely shape their own identities in the US, based on the daily life realities that they encounter. Such realities may somehow contradict their own values, beliefs and inheritance, and then may lead students to reformulate their existence in the new society. This study investigates whether they tend to preserve their cultural and religious aspects or abandon them. Additionally, this study sheds some light on Saudis who are fathers of school children and how they prescribe their children's identities.

2.2 Multiple Identities

The meanings of identities have dramatically changed from considering them as a "Stable core self." (Hall, 1996) to a dynamic, contradictory, and multiple dimensions of a person. (Pavlenko, 2002). Learners of languages in general have multiple identities, and several recent studies have proved that an English learner has multiple, diverse, dynamic, and contradictory identities. (see e.g. Anwaruddin, 2012; Norton, 2013). In addition, some researchers argued that the field of multiple identities is a site of struggle. 'Michael Lee', a participant in McKay and Wong's (1996) study, did not like to be called an ESL learner. So, he wrote about his favorite hobby (sports) in his first placement exam, while he was asked to write about his family or school. His resistance clarified social negotiations to fashion desirable identities.

Identity is highly considered a continuous and socialized process. Wenger (2000) argues that identity is shaped by a person's social, cultural and historical activities. Moreover, she claims that people usually tend to put themselves in different social situations in order to understand their identities. Therefore, identities are temporary and can be constructed in different social settings through a person's experience. This notion proves that identity is not static and never ends by time. (Kramsch, 1993). Norton (2000), assures that identity is a dynamic process and can be modified over time. Furthermore, culture and self-image are major factors in building a person's identity. In other words, one's identities are the product of the culture that one is born into or can be considered to exemplify cultural aspects.

(Wenger, 2000). This means that the social and cultural surroundings of someone certainly can shape his/ her identity. (Alruwaili, 2017).

Identity is not only created by the 'self', but also by how one interprets the self within a larger social setting. Therefore, how one perceives the self is highly dependent on the context. Socially, a particular language can raise an identity, which might be meaningful to the speaker. Su Kim (2003) confirms that language and culture are inextricably intertwined as a person usually recalls his/ her social identity through speech. Weedon (1987) states the relationship between a language, a social context and the 'self', as "Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and constructed. Yet, it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed." One's beliefs, morals, and values are argued to build identities. (see e.g. Valsiner, 2000).

Norton (2013) claims that investment in language learning is mainly used to express the complex thoughts and experiences of learners in the target language, as they change their social world. When learners interact using the target language, they do not only exchange information with native speakers but also try to shape identities in the social world. McKay and Wong (1996) state that the needs and desires of learners must be understood as means of investment in learning the target language. Generally, learners usually have some sort of motivation to learn a new language. This motivation comes either from their desire to be integrated into society, or their need to obtain a higher position. (Norton, 2000).

As concluded from different reviews of identities, there are multiple identities that can be shown in different situations such as: at work, in public, at home or at universities. A person can perform a different identity in each context. International students sometimes face some challenges and difficulties when they move to study in an English-native-speaking country which could lead to formulating their identity. These challenges include finding accommodations, achieving learning techniques and engaging with the university society (Cohen, 1990). Linguistic weaknesses may also affect the adjustment of international students, especially in their first years (Channell, 1990). In classrooms, clear instructions and students engagement are found as means of facilitating and helping to ease such problems. Awareness of the challenges that international students usually face inside and outside classrooms surely facilitates their educational development and supports their college outcomes.

2.3 Saudi Learners' Identities in the US

During the last two decades, a large influx of Saudi students has enrolled at American universities because of the launching of a new scholarship program in 2006. The Saudi MoE (2016) revealed that the total number of Saudi students who are enrolled at US educational institutions reached 100,000. Saudi students' experiences differ from other international students' experiences in the US, due to distinctive economic, social, religious and political factors (Miller, 2002). Al Ramadan (2016) stated that Saudi students constituted 6.1 % of the international students enrolled at US universities, represented the highest number of Middle Eastern students in the US, and occupied the fourth largest number of international students.

English is no wonder considered the language of power around the world since it gives its users more opportunities for educational and social advancement. Thus, many people tend to learn English either as a foreign or as a second language. However, one must remember that "All languages carry within them a particular worldview and a particular culture." (Su Kim, 2003). This leads to the fact which says that culture and language cannot be separated. Several researchers argued that language has an influence on identity. "Identity constructs and is constructed by language." (Norton, 1997), "Identity is constituted through and by language." (Ricento, 2005), "The language we acquire determines the way we construct our vision of the world." (Su Kim, 2003), and "...differences in languages do have a significant impact on differences in thinking." (Watson-Gegeo, 2004).

The power and influence of the English language in addition to the fact of being widespread across the world, surely affect the identities of its learners. The question here is how this language may affect Saudi students who have a totally different culture, which sometimes collides with the ideologies associated with English. Research papers, which have been carried out to understand the Saudi experiences in the US are not quite enough. This would add some strength to the discussion of international students since Saudi students form a significant ratio of international students who have a different culture. Additionally, studies were set to support international students in their educational process, yet there is little focus on international Saudi students. Very few studies have been done to get the perception of Saudi students in regard to their identity in the US.

Recently, researchers have investigated the identities of international students, but the voice of Saudi students is still absent. This study intends to consider the scarcity of studies on Saudi students' identities in light of the increasing number of Saudis coming to the US. Despite this noticeable increase, there is an obvious lack of journal publications about Saudi students in the research projects on international students. That seems weird, and people wonder about the reasons behind it, as Saudi students symbolized a big ratio of international students in the US campuses. It could be attributed to the fact that Saudi students spend a few years in the US and they go back home as soon as they finish their studies. Despite the importance of cultural knowledge in bridging the differences between different cultures, there is a lack of knowledge about Arabic cultures by researchers in the US. As a result, Saudis may carry out some research related to such topics, but in their mother tongue. As Ph.D. Saudi students in the US are seen as non-native speakers of English, they definitely have different identities. Moreover, this study provides a general overview of the experiences of Saudi teachers who come to the US as English learners, and parents of learners. More interestingly, the clear voice of Saudi female students, which has been ignored in several studies, will be researched and presented.

3. The Gap in the Literature

This study identifies gaps that would benefit from future research. As has been presented above, previous studies have shown some of the difficulties and challenges that students encounter when they study abroad. Previous research papers also focused on the various aspects of the identities of foreign students in different contexts, but they have not been inclusive, and hence this study is seeking to focus on different aspects of the identities of Saudi Ph.D. students when interacting with native English speakers in various contexts. Furthermore, the previously mentioned papers focused on identity aspects modified but not the ones they preserve during their educational journey, and the factors that play a significant role in such issues.

4. Objectives

The primary concern of this study is to explore how a different culture may affect a person's identity, specifically Ph.D. students, which appears recurrently in their experience as learners in the US. For instance, how Saudi students perceive and negotiate their multiple identities while studying in the US. It also seeks to uncover how their children's identities tend to modify in such communities. In addition, this study intends to investigate whether those students would preserve their cultural and religious identities in such contexts or tend to abandon them in order to fit in with the US community. Moreover, it spots a light on the Saudi voice, both genders, and how gender affects the chosen identity aspect.

Therefore, a qualitative research framework is used to conceptualize this article. The study sets out to investigate the following research questions:

- a) How do Saudi doctoral students negotiate their multiple identities (Muslims/ Arabs/ English teachers/ English learners/ bilinguals/ Parents of English learners) in the process of learning English in the US?
- b) What are the Saudi students' perceptions and attitudes regarding their multiple identities while studying in the US?

5. Methodology

5.1 Subjects

For the purpose of this study, Ph.D. Saudi students at the University of Memphis agreed to voluntarily participate in this study. All of them were recruited by administering information sheets containing demographic information about gender, age, marital status, level of education, number of children, school grades and details about years of exposure to their second language.

The subjects of the interviews in this study were contacted either through immediate contact or through the department of English, where a growing number of Saudi graduate students was noticeable. Some of them were also recruited through random emails sent to the Saudi graduate students and announcements through flyers on the notice boards.

5.2 Participants

The participants were Saudi Ph.D. candidates and parents of K-12 students in American public schools. They are all Ph.D. Students and this assures they have good knowledge of the English language. All participants were drawn from the department of English, where the researcher can contact and recruit them. The sample of this study comprised ten participants who were selected based on availability and convenience for the purpose of the study. They all had to have been in the US for at least one semester in order to be able to judge their identities and the changes that happened to their children, if there any.

All members of the sample had to be teachers of English in KSA and to have studied English in Saudi public schools before they joined their English departments at one of the Saudi universities. The participants were meant to be unfamiliar with the US culture before they moved in. They were Saudi citizens from different parts of the country, which would help the researcher to make sure that the participants have different backgrounds.

The potential participants were intended to be six men and four women. The researcher tended to choose more Saudi males, since they are easy to meet and there would not be any risk of offense in meeting them in or out of the classroom. On the other hand, women were chosen in this study because the researcher wanted to get their perceptions regarding their identities since they surely attended sex-segregated public schools in KSA. Yet, the situation is totally different in the US where a co-educational environment is applied, and teamwork is highly recommended. The researcher exerts efforts to convince females to participate in this study and show the significance of such studies to both education and learning processes.

All participants were asked to participate in this study on a voluntary basis. The researcher clearly explained to them the goals of this study and the methodology he applied in this research paper.

6. Data Elicitation

6.1 Data Collection

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of Ph.D. Saudi students who are enrolled in the US English programs, and how they approach the issue of changing identities as English learners and parents of English learners. A qualitative research design was utilized by the researcher in the form of interviews. The data collection included interviewing five randomly selected Saudi ESL students of both genders, whose perspectives and attitudes with regard to their identity and English Learning were audiotaped. Other sets of questions targeted their relationships, socialization and friendships. Questions about demographics, perspectives and attitudes were all

administered in English. Finally, the participants were given direct questions related to the impact of learning English on their identities. This goes in line with Patton’s (2002) description of the purpose of conventional qualitative interviews. He mentioned that the purpose of interviewing people is to allow the researcher to enter the other person’s perspective.

The researcher conducted the interviews with participants in a one-to-one setting at the university during school hours. Each interview lasted from thirty minutes to an hour over three weeks. The researcher also conducted follow-up interviews with some participants for more clarification and elaboration. The interviews were semi-structured, where the “interviewer has a set of predetermined questions, but the interviewer is free to follow up a question with additional questions that probe further.” (Perry, Fowler & Semeniuk, 2005). The researcher employed a set of questions, which worked as a guideline during the interviews. In this study, the researcher kept in mind certain questions to be asked for every person interviewed. For example, all participants were asked about their previous education, backgrounds, the duration of their stay in the US, their attitudes toward life in the US and activities they performed with their families during this period of time. Regarding their children, they were asked questions about their ages, education and spare time.

The researcher conducted the semi-structured questions, which allowed him to interject with any appropriate and additional questions and for participants to follow topics of their own interests. This sort of interview is preferable for the researcher since it allows him to prepare his questions ahead and to be prepared during the interview. The researcher followed an interview guide in order to achieve a reliable and comparable data set. The flow of the interviews was meant to be highly driven by the participants. Additionally, the researcher was taking notes while interviewing. Bernard (1988) clarified that semi-structured interviews are the best way to follow when the researcher will not get more than one interview for each participant and he/ she is going to send several interviewers out into the field to collect data.

6.2 Data Analysis

For qualitative data such as the data in this study, the analysis normally consists of identifying, coding and categorizing patterns or themes found in the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) point out that “Data collection should be followed immediately by analysis.” Thus, once the data were collected, the researcher utilized the Grounded Theory (GT) to analyze the interviews.

“Thematic analysis is a method for analyzing qualitative data that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyze, and report repeated patterns.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This flexible method is useful for describing data, but it also involves interpretation in the processes of selecting codes and constructing themes for ease of discussion. This method tends to produce themes from texts such as interviews or focus group transcripts and it is very important when there are large amounts of information so that responses to a research question can emerge. To conduct a thematic analysis in qualitative research there are various approaches including multiple steps processes: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up.

Morse (1994) also mentions that the GT method is suitable when the researcher has little information about a subject or problem area. To explore new ground, it is highly advantageous for the researcher to be flexible within the interview situation. As a result, using semi-structured interviews is compatible with the GT, since it provides the interviewer an opportunity to ask questions, in the same way, each time. It is also flexible in the sequencing of questions and the depth of exploration (Fielding, 1994).

First, the researcher transcribed the recordings. Then, the transcription was examined for coding the data. The process of coding was to reduce the data by classifying it into patterns of analysis and coding each pattern as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). Through pattern coding, the researcher grouped the data according to the themes that emerged on the transcripts in order to minimize the rich data into smaller units. Then, the themes or main ideas were gathered in certain categories for reporting the results. The researcher was aware that some data could be personal characteristics.

7. Results and Discussion

This chapter shows the findings and discussions of the research and consists of 7 sections, including a thematic analysis. A thematic analysis is used to analyse the qualitative data and to code them for ease of discussion. As descriptive analysis depends on classifying data thematically (Al-Rdaat, 2017), it includes the thematic classification of identities, analysis and coding. It also examines the impact of learning English in the US on Saudi Ph.D. students and their children. This sample includes 60% of males and 40% of females.

According to the interview questions and open-ended questionnaire, the researcher basically classified the aspects of identities into 7. Table 1. shows the basic thematic classification, coding and sub-coding. For more details, check appendix b

	Theme	Code	Sub-code
1	Religion	Muslim How do you describe yourself as a Muslim in the US?	Ten responses: - (2) responded as: Arabi Muslim. - (2) responded as: Arabi. - (6) responded as: Foreign and lonely.
2	Culture	Perceived in and out of the classroom How are you perceived by your classmates and outside the classroom?	Ten responses: - (2) responded as: A Muslim or Arabi. - (2) responded as: Arabi with brown skin. - (2) responded as: Stranger. - (4) responded as: A Conservative Muslim
3	Culture and	Dressing Do you think the way you	Ten responses: - (2) responded as: No.

	Religion	dress up has an impact on others' opinions of your identity?	- (8) responded as: Yes
4	Gender	Mixed-gender class How do you perceive your mixed-gender class in the US?	Ten responses: - (4) responded as: Very nice. - (6) responded as: Hard at the beginning.
5	Mixed identities	Islam, language, family What is your attitude towards being a Muslim/ English learner/ bilingual/ parent of an English learner in the US?	Ten responses: - (10) responded as: It is a good chance to study in the US.
6	Childhood	School's children identity Do you think that US schools have an impact on your child's identity?	Ten responses: - (2) responded as: They do not have kids. - (8) responded as: Yes.
7	Traditions	Preserving traditions and values What is the most important issue that you want your child to preserve during his/ her stay in the US?	Ten responses: - (2) responded as: They have no kids. - (8) responded as: Their religion and values.

7.1 Religion and Identity

Religion has a great influence on someone's values, morals and identity in some communities where it plays an important role. In religious communities, Warsaw (2013) argues that the influence of religion on identity arises from community influence. Moreover, most of the time, the relationship between a person's religion and his identity can be contextualized by discussing one's behaviors in specific situations. However, this paper will examine the impact of religion, in a conservative community such as Saudi Arabia, on a person's identity.

For the purpose of this study, the participants were asked about their religious identity as Muslims in the US, and how they describe themselves in accordance. The researcher found that two students described themselves as Arab while two other participants identified themselves as Arab and Muslim. However, six of the participants expressed themselves as foreigners and they feel lonely. The majority expressed being foreign which means being less confident in negotiating issues with native speakers.

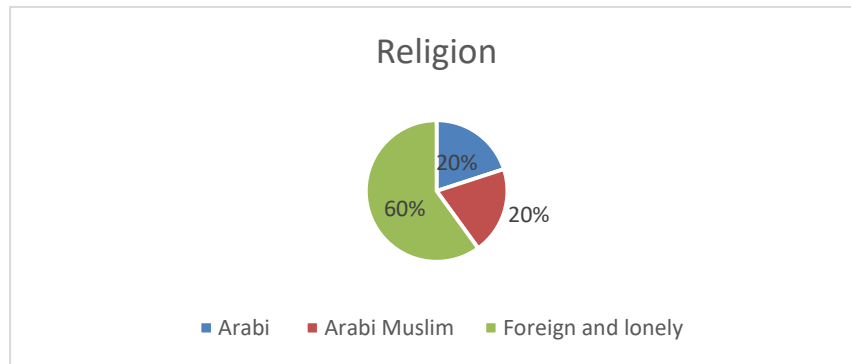


Figure 1. describes the responses regarding the theme 'religion'

7.2 Culture and Identity

Each community has its own cultural and ethnic criteria which impact its individuals' identities. Wenger (2000) argues that identity is shaped by a person's social and cultural activities, which means that the surrounding factors play an important role in modifying the identity. For instance, people's customs, skin colors and facial features are the nature of their cultural and ethnic identities. Therefore, the way other people perceive someone surely affects his/ her attitude and identity.

When participants have been asked about how native speakers of English perceive them outside classrooms, two participants responded that they had been perceived as Arabs and Muslims. However, two others mentioned that they had been perceived as Arabs with brown skin. Moreover, four other participants elaborated that they were seen as conservative Muslims while the last two participants mentioned they were culturally seen as strangers.

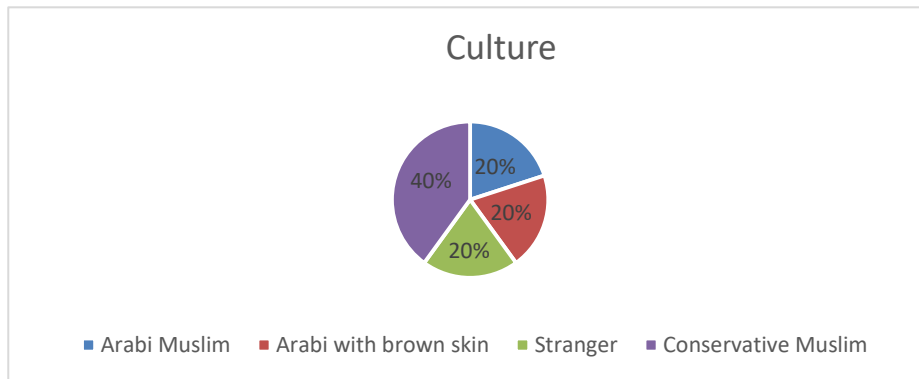


Figure 2. describes the responses regarding the theme ‘culture’

7.3 Culture, Religion and Identity

Religion is essential, especially in KSA as it forms people’s life, values and relationships. Moreover, the way people dress, most of the time, identifies their cultural and religious values. Su Kim (2003) confirms that language and culture are inextricably intertwined, and in this context, we can spot the light on the fact that culture is highly impacted by religion, especially in KSA, where religion controls people’s dressing, values and even social relationships. Due to the significant difference between KSA and the US, the researcher decided to study the impact of the dressing style on others’ opinions.

Therefore, the researcher asked the participants about others’ opinions related to their clothes, which are culturally and religiously related to Islam. Eight people confirmed that the way they dress up affects others’ opinions towards them, and therefore, their behaviors. Some mentioned that their biggest difficulty lies in the fact that their clothes reflect their cultural and religious backgrounds. However, two of the participants mentioned that they had not any problem at all regarding this matter.

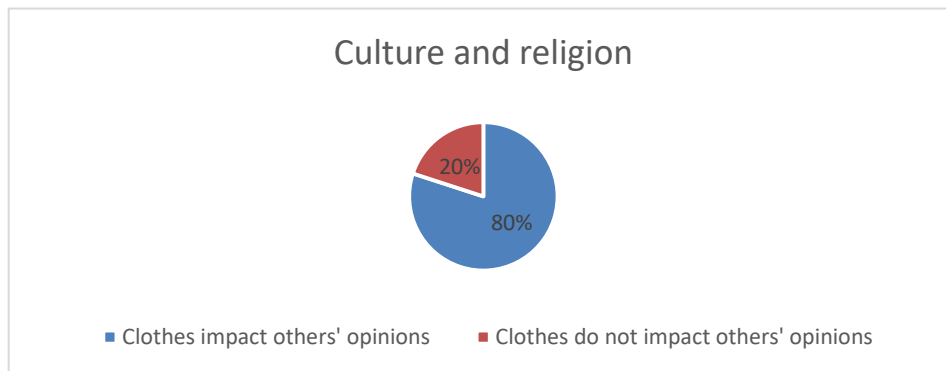


Figure 3. describes the responses regarding the theme ‘culture and religion’

7.4 Mixed-gender Classes and Identity

Nowadays, Mixed-gender classes are the standard for most schools all over the world, and this style creates an opportunity for men and women to study and work together, in the same environment. However, some cultures, for instance, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, do not accept this style due to cultural or religious reasons. This chapter discusses the impact of mixed-gender classes on Saudi Ph.D. students who used to study in gender-segregated classes in KSA. As there are great differences between both genders in many aspects viz. physical, psychological, social relations, language and even everyday interactions, Deoksoon (2016) argues that, with male identity ascendance and female identity subordinating, this highly affects a person’s identity.

For this purpose, the researcher asked the participants about their perspectives regarding their mixed-gender classes in the US, and four of them expressed their excitement about this matter, while six others expressed their concern at the beginning, and then they accepted this cultural change.

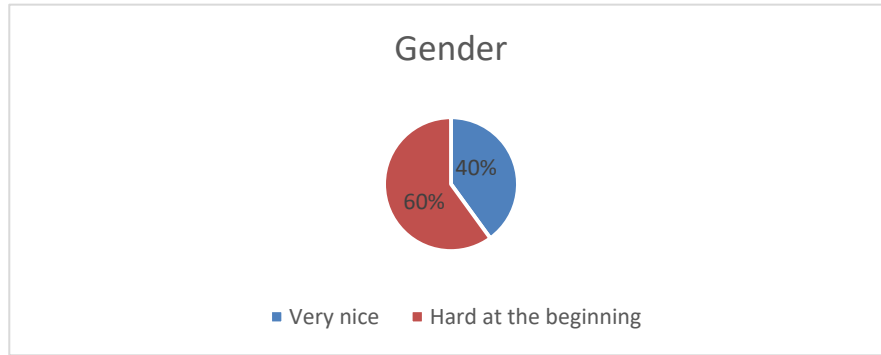


Figure 4. describes the responses regarding the theme 'gender'

7.5 Mixed Identities (Muslim/ English Learner/ Bilingual/ a Parent of an English Learner in the US)

These mixed identities overlapped and one may affect the other. For example, being a Muslim may affect your culture and values, and this, as a result, may affect the student’s abilities to learn the language or even their children’s. For example, a conservative student may not accept dealing with students from the other gender which as a result may affect the learning process and language acquisition.

This research shows that despite being very hard to adapt, all of the participants agreed that studying in the US is a great chance for them to learn their second language in an English-native-speaking- country, where there are various cultures and values.

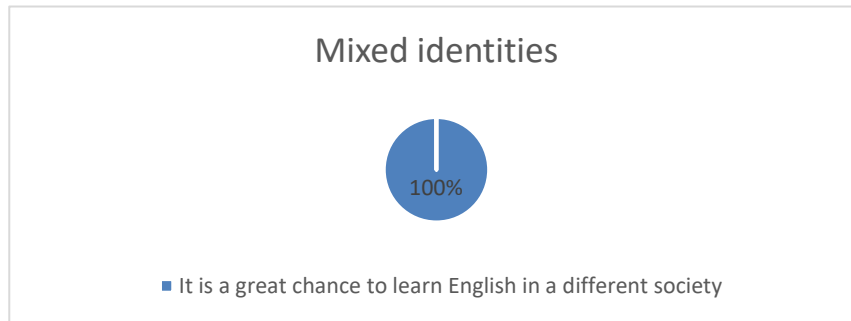


Figure 5. describes the responses regarding the theme 'mixed identities'

7.6 Childhood and Identity

Undoubtedly, children have a stable self that can be developed according to the context. It is obvious that education plays an important role in children’s social identities especially in the classroom and through playing. Children have the ability to change their self-identity due to their various relationships with their peers. These relations contribute to modifying their emotional, social or even their choice of a language. DiMaria (2022) discusses the idea that every child has a social identity in which he/ she derives a sense of pride according to their social position, culture, ethnicity, interests, achievements and beliefs.

The researcher investigated the impact of education on children. And therefore, he asked the participants about this matter and found that eight of them agreed that the school environment impacted their children’s identities due to having a different culture. Whereas two of the participants, who do not have kids, said they had no idea related to this matter. This means that the majority, who have kids, noticed a significant impact on their children during their stay in the US.

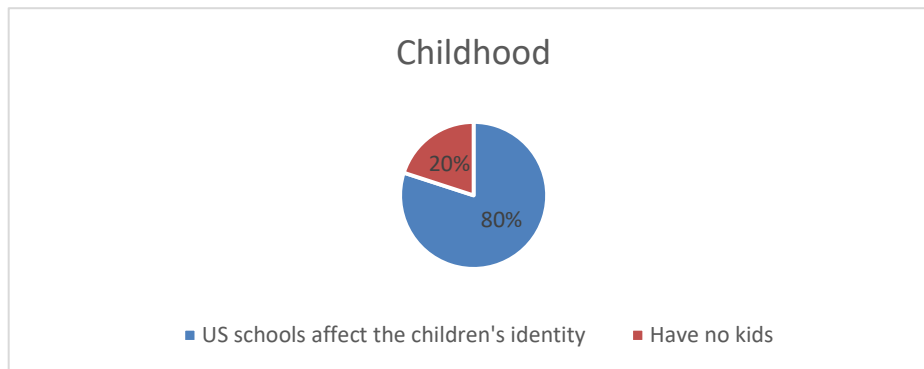


Figure 6. describes the responses regarding the theme 'childhood'

7.7 Traditions and Identity

Once traditions are very important as a part of the inherited history and the core of a group's identity, they are also very important in forming the future. Additionally, these traditions contribute to a sense of belonging to a specific society or group, such as hospitality and receiving guests, so the new generations adopt them. However, these traditions can be flexible enough to be modified according to specific factors. Honko (2009) discusses the relationship between culture and traditions, and how they are highly connected, and the importance of ethnic survival in minority situations.

The researcher investigated the most important traditions and values the parents would like their children to preserve during their stay in the US. According to the conducted interview questions, the majority of the Saudi students have agreed that they would like their children to preserve their religious identity as Muslims who study English in the US, except for the participants who do not have kids.

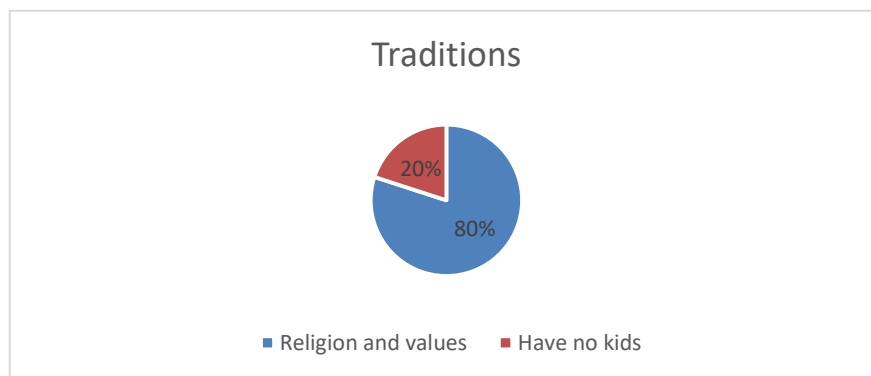


Figure 7. describes the responses regarding the theme 'traditions'

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Conclusions

Hopefully, this study sheds a light on the Not all of the Saudi students those who took part in the study attitudes and perspectives as language learners toward their multiple identities in the US. Additionally, this study seeks to uncover how Saudi students negotiate their multiple identities while studying in the US. Moreover, this study provides a general overview of the experiences of Saudi teachers who come to the US as English learners. According to the candidates' answers, mixed identity including being a Muslim, an English learner, a bilingual, and a parent of an English learner has the greatest impact on someone's self-perspective of being a part of the students who study English in the US. Moreover, it shows that all participants, who have kids, experienced a great impact on their children's identities and they are all proud of their religious and cultural identities, which means they would like their children to preserve these identities. Finally, it is hoped that this study will help the Saudi teachers in Saudi Arabia who are planning to pursue their studies in the US.

8.2 Limitations of the Study

There were two limitations of this study, the first was that a small sample of ten participants who learned English in the US is not enough to generalize the results and they do not represent the whole of Saudi society, due to the limited number of Saudi students who study PhD. in the US. The second challenge was the fact that meeting Saudi ladies outside of the classroom is not favorable for Saudi females, so meeting them was a kind of challenge for the researcher.

8.3 Recommendations

As this study focuses on various aspects of one's identity in different contexts, it is recommended to study the role of the financial factor on such issues as this factor may affect the language background and abilities of the students. It is also recommended to study the aspects of identities from a psychological perspective, in which the researcher tries to analyze the psychology of the subject in order to understand the main reason behind choosing to reserve an identity.

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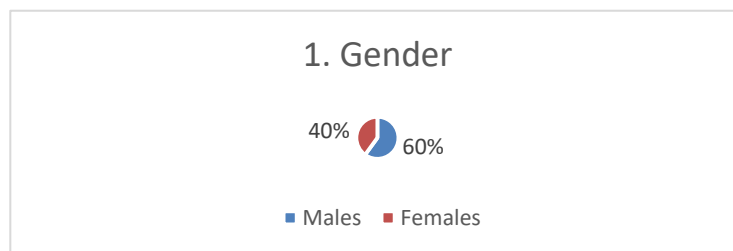
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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview questions

1. How do you describe yourself as a Muslim in the US?
2. How are you perceived by your classmates and outside the class?
3. Do you think the way you dressed up has an impact on others' opinions towards your identity?
4. How do you perceive your mixed-gender class in the US? Please explain.
5. What is your attitude towards being a Muslim / English learner/ bilingual/ and a parent of an English learner in the US?
6. Do you think that US schools have an impact on your child identity?
7. What is the most important issue that you want your child to preserve during his/ her stay in the US?

Appendix B: Open-ended questionnaire



2. How do you describe yourself as a Muslim in the US?

- a. Arabian Muslim
- b. Arabi and Muslim
- c. Arabi
- d. Arabi
- e. Lonely
- f. I feel lonely
- g. I'm a foreign Saudi Muslim who proudly follows Islamic rules and values
- h. Foreign and lonely
- i. A foreign Muslim female
- j. Foreigner

3. How are you perceived by your classmates and outside the class?

- a. As a Muslim or Arabian
- b. Arabi Muslim
- c. Arab and brown skin
- d. An Arabi who has brown skin
- e. A stranger
- f. Totally different, I see myself as a stranger
- g. At the beginning of my English learning in the US, I did not feel comfortable to participate in groups with native speakers of English because I feel they have the same attitude. Later, I became more comfortable speaking up and negotiating any educational issue in class with anyone. outside class, I am seen as a Muslim who is strict to her religion. With time, I feel more confident in my English language and relaxed to talk about any cultural topic
- h. A conservative Muslim woman who strictly follows her religious. Maybe a serious and hard worker
- i. A conservative Muslim
- j. A conservative Muslim, who strictly follows Islamic values

4. Do you think the way you dressed up has an impact on others' opinions of your identity?

- a. I would say yes, in most cases it is true
- b. Yes
- c. Sure
- d. Sure, the way I dressed up clearly reflects my religion. In my class, classmates used to celebrate parties without inviting me.
- e. Sure, as I wear hijab. I think that others are sensitive to starting any topic with me, especially those who are not classmates.
- f. Most of the times, I can say yes
- g. Yes
- h. This is true
- i. Not at all
- j. No

5. How do you perceive your mixed-gender class in the US? please explain.

- a. At the beginning, it was embarrassing to talk or work with the opposite gender, but then the situation became normal
- b. As a Saudi female, it was very hard for me to effectively participate in groups with boys. After a while, I started to work with anyone in the class and found that very easy.
- c. At the beginning, it was hard for me as I was accustomed to this environment. Later, I got used to it and feel that it adds to my knowledge as I negotiate different educational issues with different points of view. I also learn how other teachers in different countries deal with general issues in class
- d. It was not easy at the beginning
- e. It was very hard to fit in at the beginning
- f. At the beginning, it was very hard but later on it became easier
- g. Very nice
- h. Lovely
- i. Good experience
- j. Nice experience, it was good

6. What is your attitude towards being a Muslim/ English learner/ bilingual/ and a parent of an English learner in the US?

- a. It was a heavy responsibility. However, with time, you would manage to balance your time and effort.
- b. I think it's really cool
- c. Good
- d. Great chance
- e. I think I'm lucky to have the chance to study in the US. I am exposed to different cultures and beliefs, so I can adjust my identity accordingly. Also, I can see different methods and styles of teaching English which will help me to adopt the one that suits my class later. As a parent, I want my two kids to see me as an ideal mom who follows her faith and Islamic rules
- f. It was nice to have such a chance
- g. It was a great chance to learn English in a native speaking country
- h. I feel that I am lucky to have the opportunity to pursue my study in the US because I became able to feel diverse identities. I could say that I learn how to deal with them accordingly and then build my experience
- i. Good chance to learn English in a native speaking country
- j. This was great

7. Do you think that US schools have an impact on your child's identity?

- a. Of course, although some schools try to consider a child's identity, it was hard to avoid such an impact
- b. Definitely
- c. Definitely, I think parents need to work hard to avoid such an impact on their children.
- d. Of course
- e. I totally agree with that so parents need to be more conscious that kids could be affected in the US schools. They have a different culture than ours.
- f. Sure
- g. Too many things have changed
- h. Totally agree
- i. I have no kids
- j. I have no idea as I have no kids

8. What is the most important issue that you want your child to preserve during his/ her stay in the US?

- a. His or her identity and to be proud of being a Muslim and keep respecting other cultures at the same time
- b. Pray
- c. Their religion and values
- d. Religion
- e. Their religion and values
- f. Islamic values
- g. Islamic values
- h. Religion and values
- i. I have no kids
- j. I have no kids

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