

**Quality of women's learning experiences
in digital information systems and
learning environment in higher
education in Saudi Arabia**

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Abstract

Background: Students' learning experience is fundamental to students' development and learning in Higher Education. In order to deliver quality education, an effective exploratory study of the nature of Saudi women's learning experience is established. Limited efforts have been made to report Saudi women's learning experience in Higher Education. This study investigated the learning journey of Saudi females in Higher Education, examined their goals for Higher Education and explained how their goals related to their learning process.

Methods and methodology: Two cases were studied in Saudi Arabia, from different cities and public universities: one in Riyadh and the second in Jeddah. This qualitative study, situated in the interpretive research paradigm, involved a two-step approach. First, questionnaires with open-ended questions were distributed to capture the overall situation (responses were 263). Second, a volunteer sampling method was employed, informed by questionnaire responses, allowing detailed investigations to draw in-depth feedback from participants: 41 semi-structured interviews with 20 female students and 21 tutors were audio-recorded and transcribed. A constructivist soft system methodology involving the constant comparative method of analysis was used to code and analyse data.

Results: A student learning experience model was constructed following the soft system methodology. This model helped to build a clear understanding of the Saudi women's learning journey and to propose a unique theoretical framework combining social, cultural, behavioral and self-understanding of the studied field. The proposed theoretical framework links three dimensions of learning experience: learning settings and personal learning environments, the influence of religion, culture and family values, and students' behaviors and identity. This framework also added new perspectives to the concept of learning experience to suit Saudi Arabia: the influence of Islam on students' life, the ultimate outcome of the journey: achieving highest grades, and shifting the power position of female students aligning with society expectations. Consequently, the change of students' behavior during their learning journey is the core of this proposed theoretical framework.

Conclusion: These findings provide some explanations for the quality of Saudi undergraduate female students learning experience: they tried to establish that students could learn and overcome any social barrier to demonstrate their worth in society. These findings have implications that may influence decision makers in Saudi Arabia to provide students with

more resources to improve the quality of Saudi universities. It could also help decision-makers around the world to understand the educational background of overseas female students to facilitate their transition.

Contents

Table of Contents

<u>Abstract</u>	i
<u>Contents</u>	iii
<u>List of Tables</u>	vi
<u>List of Figures</u>	vii
<u>List of abbreviations</u>	viii
<u>Acknowledgments</u>	x
<u>Declaration</u>	xi
Introduction and structure of thesis	1
<u>Chapter 1: Background of Saudi Arabia</u>	5
1.1 Introduction	5
1.2 Introduction to Saudi Arabia	7
1.3 Islam in Saudi Arabia	10
1.4 Women in Islam and Saudi Arabia	12
1.5 The Education System in Saudi Arabia	17
1.5.1 General education system	17
1.5.2 Higher education system.....	19
1.5.3 Educational technology in Saudi Arabia	22
1.6 Women’s Education in Saudi Arabia	23
1.7 Princess Norah bint Abdul Rahman University for Women	31
1.8 Conclusion	32
<u>Chapter 2: Background of the Quality of Learning Experience</u>	33
2.1 Introduction	33
2.2 Learning experience: meaning and definition	33
2.3 Background and conceptual frameworks	34
2.4 Review of the related literature	38
2.4.1 Learning environment.....	38
2.4.2 Curriculum and resources	45
2.4.3 Induction and transition.....	47
2.4.4 Student perception of learning	50
2.4.5 Cultural influences	55
2.4.6 Assessment and feedback	57
2.4.7 Student learning experience as a tool of measuring the quality in higher education.....	59
2.5 Student learning experience in Saudi Arabia	61
2.5.1 Learning environments	62
2.5.2 Approaches to teaching and development in resource and curriculum	70
2.5.3 Induction and transition.....	71
2.5.4 Students learning perceptions.....	73
2.5.5 Quality assurance and enhancement	74
2.5.6 Cultural influences	75
2.6 Conclusion and significance of this thesis	76
<u>Chapter 3: Research Methodology</u>	78
3.1 Introduction	78
3.2 Aim of the study and research questions	78
3.3 Theory and research:	79
3.3.1 Inductive theory	79
3.4 Epistemological consideration (worldview):	81
3.4.1 Interpretivism.....	82

3.5 Ontological considerations:	82
3.5.1 Social Constructivism	83
3.6 Research strategy	86
3.7 Research Methodology	90
3.8 Researcher role	96
3.8.1 <i>The Case Researcher as Teacher:</i>	97
3.8.2 <i>The Case Researcher as Advocate:</i>	97
3.8.3 <i>The Case Researcher as Evaluator:</i>	98
3.8.4 <i>The Case Researcher as Biographer:</i>	98
3.8.5 <i>The Case Researcher as Interpreter:</i>	98
3.9 Trustworthiness of the Study	99
3.9.1 Credibility	100
3.9.2 Reflexivity.....	102
3.9.3 Transferability.....	103
3.9.4 Dependability.....	103
3.9.5 Confirmability	104
3.10 Data Analysis	104
3.10.1 Using soft system methodology as an analysis framework.....	105
3.10.2 Using thematic analysis as a tool	112
3.10.2.1 Coding	113
3.10.2.2 Phases of thematic analysis.....	117
3.11 Research Focus	118
The following part will explain in details each too that I have used in my data collection....	120
3.12 Observations	121
3.12.1 Sampling	122
3.13 Semi-structured interviews:	124
3.13.1 Sampling	126
3.13.2 Participants.....	127
3.13.3 Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria.....	127
3.14 Questionnaires with open-ended questions:	128
3.14.1 Recruitment of Participants	129
3.14.2 Data Recording	130
3.14.3 Transcription.....	130
3.14.4 Translation.....	130
3.14.5 Data Management and Storage.....	131
3.15 Ethical Issues:	131
3.16 Conclusion	134
Chapter 4: Results	135
4.1 Introduction	135
4.2 Learning experience Model	137
4.2.1 Learning experience factors.....	139
4.2.2 Student Social Network for Learning	162
4.2.3 Achieving higher grades.....	169
4.3 Chapter Conclusion and the proposed theory	170
Chapter 5: Discussion	172
5.1 Introduction	172
5.2 Proposed theoretical framework	173
5.2.1 Learning settings and personal learning environments.....	176
5.2.2 The influence of religion, culture and family values	188
5.2.3 Students' behaviour and identity	192
5.3 Saudi Arabian women's goals within higher education: the answer to the first question (Q1. What are Saudi Arabian women's goals within higher education?)	195

5.4 Saudi Arabian women’s personal learning environments within higher education in Saudi Arabia: the answer to the second question (Q2. What kind of personal learning environments do women experience in higher education in Saudi Arabia?).....	197
5.5 Learning obstacles that female Saudi Arabian students encounter: the answer to the third question (Q3. What are the obstacles that female Saudi Arabian undergraduate students encounter during their learning journey?).....	198
5.6 Saudi Arabian women’s description of their learning experience in Saudi Arabian higher education: the answer to the fourth question (Q4. How do women describe their learning experience in Saudi Arabian higher education?).....	200
5.7 Suggestions for improving female Saudi Arabian students’ learning experience: the answer to the fifth question (Q5. What would Saudi Arabian female students suggest to improve their learning experience?).....	201
5.8 Conclusion	204
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	205
6.1 Introduction.....	205
6.2 Summary of the study.....	205
6.3 Overall conclusion	208
6.4 Strengths and limitations of the study.....	210
6.5 Recommendations	212
6.6 Future research	213
6.7 Reflection on the study.....	214
6.8 Research output	217
6.8.1 Publication	217
6.8.2 Presentation	217
Appendices	232
Appendix 1	232
Appendix 2	233
Appendix 3	234
Appendix 4	235
Appendix 5	237
Appendix 6	239
Appendix 7	240
Appendix 8	241
Appendix 9	243
Appendix 10.....	245
Appendix 11.....	246
Appendix 12.....	247
Appendix 13.....	251
Appendix 14.....	252
Appendix 15.....	253
Appendix 16.....	254
Appendix 17.....	255
Appendix 18.....	256
Appendix 19.....	257
Appendix 20.....	258
Appendix 21.....	259
Appendix 22.....	262
Appendix 23.....	263
Appendix 24.....	274

List of Tables

Table 3.1	Fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research strategies (Bryman,2004 & O’Leary, 2010)	87
Table 3.2	Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 87)	117
Table 3.3	The following types of questions were asked	124
Table 3.4	The following types of questions were asked:	124
Table 3.5	Ethical issues and responses	131
Table 4.1	The usage of social media for supporting Saudi female students’ learning	166
Table 5.1	Most common learning obstacles that female students face in their learning	199
Table 5.2	Most frequently suggested themes to improve Saudi Arabian female learning experience	202

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	Map of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	7
Figure 1.2	Saudi women expressing their own ideas publicly (youtube, 2013)	16
Figure 1.3	Famous Saudi women presenter on local channel (Mona Abo Suleiman) (youtube, 2013)	16
Figure 1.4	A photo of the main electronic page of the Saudi newspaper Al-Riyadh, showing male columnists photos, while women columnists were portrayed as faceless shadows. (Tamimi, 2010)	16
Figure 1.5	Kuttab (LANE603, 2012)	17
Figure 1.6	Grading system in Saudi's university (Morawski, 2010)	22
Figure 1.7	Male's campus	27
Figure 1.8	Female's campus	27
Figure 1.9	Female's face-to-face lectures	28
Figure 1.10	CCTV lectures	28
Figure 1.11	CCTV lectures for both genders	29
Figure 1.12	Glass wall classroom	30
Figure 2.1	The Quality of Learning Experience and Student's College Outcomes (Neumann, 1990)	35
Figure 2.2	The Quality of Learning Experience effects on Student's College Outcomes (Neumann, 1993)	36
Figure 2.3	Range of research fields under the student learning experience	76
Figure 3.1	Case Study Methodology (influenced by Yin, 2009)	95
Figure 3.2	Analyses steps	105
Figure 3.3	SSM framework for data analysis influenced by Checkland approach	108
Figure 3.4	Implementing Checkland's steps of SSM to analyse rich data	110
Figure 3.5	The Processes Involved in Reading Transcripts, Coding, Identifying Categories, and Themes	114
Figure 3.6	Mixed methods used as a first step to form the main instrument of data collection for each Case Study	119
Figure 3.7	Second step of forming the main instrument of data collection for each Case Study	120
Figure 4.1	Rich picture diagram of Saudi women's learning experience journey	136
Figure 4.2	Extracting the model of Saudi women's learning experience from rich picture	137
Figure 4.3	Model of Saudi women's learning experience in public universities	138
Figure 4.4	Students using different resources to make learning decision, as part of personal learning network	163
Figure 4.5	proposed learning experience theoretical framework	171
Figure 5.1	proposed learning experience theoretical framework	174
Figure 6.1	Summery of the PhD study	207

List of abbreviations

UK	United Kingdom
UAE	United Arab Emirates
PUH	Peace be Upon Him
ARAMCO	Arabian American Oil Company
KSU	King Saud University
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SEU	Saudi Electronic University
SR	Saudi Riyals
GPA	Grade Point Average
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
TV	Television
QLE	Quality of learning experience
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
PLN	Personal Learning Networks
CSCL	Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning
LMS	Learning Management Systems
PLE	Personal Learning Environment
USA	United States of America
CSEQ	College Student Experiences Questionnaire
CEQ	Course Experience Questionnaire
NSSE	The National Survey of Student Engagement
NSS	The National Student Survey
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
EMES	E-Learning Management Electronic System
KAU	King Abdulaziz University
CASCS	College of Applied Studies and Community Services
NCAAA	National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment
KFUPM	King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals
IT	Information Technology

MPhil	Master of Philosophy
ID	Identity
SSM	Soft Systems Methodology
MIS	Management of Information Systems
PAD	Public Administration
HA	Health Administration
HR	Human Resource
DCU	Dublin City University
ODUS	Online Data of University System
THE-QS	Times Higher Education-Quacquarelli Symonds survey
UAE	United Arab Emirates

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Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large loop followed by a horizontal line.

Dated 16th November 2018

Introduction and structure of thesis

This PhD research thesis presents the topic of Saudi women's learning experiences in business schools at Saudi Arabian public universities. The main purpose of this research is to explore the learning journey of Saudi females in Higher Education through their own experiences, understand their goals for Higher Education learning through their own words, and how they relate their goals to their learning process via their own understanding. As a researcher, I could only discover students' learning strategies and behaviours through the students' construction of their own world. This allowed me to connect the whole experience together and build a better understanding of Saudi female students' life. This thesis is not intended to criticise the learning system in Saudi Arabia or to discard the clear local laws of the process of being an undergraduate student; it is rather to present the students' own perception of their learning experience to allow readers to see the learning journey through Saudi female students' lenses. By using these lenses, one can understand how they function inside universities and discover how to improve this journey. Therefore, this research aimed to bridge the students' world to the real and required learning system in Saudi Arabia, using the Saudi female students' experience precisely to fulfil the knowledge gap of women's voices as students in the Saudi Higher Education learning process.

As a result, in discussing the results of this research, I, as a researcher, compared their experience with the existing literature that discussed such issues and I aimed to present my view of the literature existing at that time and the students' views, but I avoided an evaluation of the accuracy or truth of these results. This is because of my beliefs as a constructivist researcher that knowledge is not a fact that exists out there; rather, it is a result of social engagement between the Saudi students and the process of learning in higher education (my epistemological view). In addition, I look at the studied situation of "Saudi female students' learning experience" with its complex ideas and sets, purely on the basis of the Saudi female students' social interaction and on the participants' views of this phenomenon being studied (my ontological view). In fact, this PhD study is, as I call it, a snapshot of a certain time (2014), place (Jeddah: King Abdulaziz University: Girls' Business School, and Riyadh: Princess Norah Bint

Abdulrahman University: Collage of Business Administration), and certain individuals' understanding of themselves and the learning experience they found themselves in (the 18 Saudi female undergraduate students participating), resulting in multiple realities, and each is unique as I use the students' own words (my interpretivist role as a researcher). To meet that role, of me being interpreter to student perceptions in the learning experience, the main method of data collection, interviews with open-ended questions and several stages of analysis, is justified in the following construction of the thesis. Moreover, this PhD thesis took a unique position to deliver Saudi female students' experience through their own daily life experiences and background effects, as illustrated in the thesis structure and justification below.

- Chapter one: Background of Saudi Arabia

The main focus of this research is to explore the Saudi female students' learning experience in Saudi Arabia in Public universities Chapter one demonstrates the motivation behind the PhD research which frames this work. Providing the position and level of Saudi Higher Education, in 2009, compared to worldwide universities was the triggering idea to conduct this PhD research to offer help with the reforming process of Saudi Higher Education, which commenced in 2009. Additionally, it provides a general background of the country to establish the foundation of culture and religion that are encountered in every aspect of Saudi life. This chapter also states the system of learning in which Saudi Arabian Higher Education implies and shows the common learning steps that undergraduate students should monitor.

The chapter is not intended to critique the students' results, later presented in Chapter four, but to clarify any misconceptions about the Saudi learning system. Additionally, this chapter is meant to provide historical data that caused the breaking point in which the reforming process of Saudi Higher Education took place.

- Chapter two: Background of the Quality of Learning Experience

The aim of this chapter is to show the knowledge gap in the domain of learning experience: a clear definition of such experience and what can form that learning. The chapter illustrates a gap from the student perspective and suggests that by using students' opinions, the main aspect of the learning process can indicate the pros and cons of a given learning procedure through their learning experience.

The position of the literature in this PhD research was an on-going task before, during, and after data collection. As learning is a dynamic process that covers a huge base of research and because this is exploratory research, I did not predict in which direction this research would lead me. Therefore, when a new issue of learning in a new theme emerged during the research, I had to go back to the literature to read about such evolving subject, hence the massive subject range covered in this chapter. Saudi-focused literature was to cover the intellectual geographic location of the conducted PhD research, aiming to cover the knowledge gap in this subject of Saudi women's learning experience.

In this chapter, critical reviews of research associated with the subject of the students' learning experience are detailed. A discussion of the main concepts and ideas based on the literature relating to the undergraduate students' learning experience is presented.

- Chapter three: Research Methodology

This chapter illustrates that this PhD research followed an inductive theory building approach and deals with the literature as previous knowledge that could or could not comply in this setting of research. This means that the literature is not fact in this PhD research, as I did not measure the results' value against the truth of the existing literature. I only discuss students' views compared with previous research and studies and how I think that students' perceptions of learning experience might comply with or differ from other studies' findings and why that happened in this case, presented explicitly in Chapter five.

Therefore, the methods of data collection were constructed initially from the literature but students' questionnaire responses, staff interviews and the researcher's observations of lectures and campus have all formed and developed the questions of the main method of data collection: interviewing Saudi female students with qualitative open-ended questions.

This chapter continues by positioning the study in the interpretive research paradigm and explains how my epistemological and ontological decisions have influenced my choice to use constructivist and interpretivist case study methodology. It continues by discussing the ethical considerations relevant to this research study and, finally, it discusses the measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of this research study.

- Chapter four: Results

This chapter demonstrates what students constructed through their own beliefs and in their own words, as findings of this PhD research.

The chapter begins by presenting the rich picture model of the results to provide the context for the findings. Then it shows how I went from a complicated model to a simpler model that can present the Saudi female learning experience to readers. Along the way, each aspect of the model is supported by quotations from participant interviews and serves as supportive evidence for the claims made. The data are organised to illustrate the key conceptual components that form and propose the constructed theoretical framework.

- Chapter five: Discussion

This chapter looks at the students' learning experience perception, stating similarities and differences in relation to previous studies.

The full-proposed theoretical framework of the Saudi female learning experience in this study is presented and discussed in this chapter.

- Chapter six: Conclusion

This chapter illustrates how a reader could use these research results to understand the learning process and includes further recommendations.

The chapter considers my final reflection on the research journey and the impact I personally had on the study. Conclusively, there is a discussion of the study's contribution to the knowledge base of students' learning experiences and the implications the results have for practice, education and further research.

Chapter 1:

Background of Saudi Arabia

1.1 Introduction

During the last decade, both policy makers and academics in the field of development have given increasing attention to the relationship between education and development (Tjomsland, 2009). The quality of a country's higher education (HE) sector and its assessment is not only key to its social and economic well-being but is also a defining element affecting the status of that higher education system at the worldwide level (UNESCO, 2005). In addition, the majority of major policy proposals in this field highlight the importance of female education. Furthermore, this issue has attracted an increasing number of academics wishing to focus on development and education in their work (Kabeer, 2005; Stromquist, 2001), which means that the education of females is currently one of the most important subjects in the international development dialogue.

In Saudi Arabia, General Education faced many challenges, such as low test marks for Saudi Arabian students compared to students from other countries: as students in the 8th Grade in Saudi Arabia were ranked 43rd in Mathematics and 39th in Science out of 50 countries, according to a report by McKinsey & Company (2007). In addition, the major challenge for Saudi Arabian Higher Education was the growing domestic qualification and encouraging cooperation between higher education programs and the community (Alshayea, 2012). Furthermore, the quality of learning in Saudi higher education may have been affected by the ranking of Saudi universities on a global scale at that time. In fact, none of the Saudi universities were listed within the 392 leading educational institutions in the World, according to a report by Mine Paristech (2011). King Saud University, however, ranked 199th in Webometrics, and King Fahad University of Petroleum & Minerals ranked 404th. Similarly, in the Times Higher Education-Quacquarelli Symonds Survey (THE-QS), King Saud University ranked 247th and King Fahad University of Petroleum & Minerals ranked 266th. This performance level was very low compared with other countries within the developing world (Abouammoh, 2010).

Although these rankings have changed currently, the aforementioned rankings have caused Saudi Arabia to reform its education system (AlMunajjed, 2009). At the higher education level, for example, the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) was established, and a program aimed to assess the quality of Saudi Higher Education announced on their website that only eight universities - out of 26 - in Saudi Arabia had its approval recognition (6 private and only 2 public universities) (NCAAA, 2009). As a result, the Saudi Ministry of Education started a reform project for all its learning institutions in 2009 (AlMunajjed, 2009) and then started to witness the increase in university numbers that have gained full accreditation from the NCAAA. In 2018, the NCAAA (2018) announced on their website that 16 universities - out of 78 (26 public, 10 private universities, and 42 private colleges) - in Saudi Arabia had its full approval recognition (7 private and only 9 public universities). Additionally, the Ministry of Education, within its higher education sector reforms, has established many initiatives to improve the current situation, for instance, granted scholarships for Saudis to study abroad at all levels: undergraduate and graduate studies in all majors aiming to recruit those scholarship holders (after receiving their degrees) into different governmental jobs including universities (Ministry of Higher Education, 2018). However, The Higher Education reforming project is currently progressing and is supervised by a high-level committee, consisting of academics, experts (local and expats) and members of the Government Council (*Shoura*) (Altamimi, 2011 and Ministry of Higher Education, 2018). However, the voice of students (especially female undergraduate Saudi students) and their opinions remain hidden; therefore, this PhD study focused on female undergraduate students' points of view on the learning experience, discussed their learning issues and obstacles, and proposed points and issues which may influence and help with the process for improving female education, in specific fields, and throughout higher education in general.

This chapter defines women's position in Saudi Arabia, to give a general background for the reader to understand the special case of the Muslim society of Saudi Arabia and their cultural beliefs. This chapter starts by introducing the country of Saudi Arabia, and subsequently highlights the position of women in Islam and in Saudi Arabia, followed by defining the education system in the country including Saudi

female education, and then will finish by underlining the position of Saudi female education currently as a starting point for this PhD study.

1.2 Introduction to Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (in Arabic: “al-Mamlaka al-Arabiya as-Saudiya”) dominates most of the Arabian Peninsula (i.e. about 850,000 square miles). It is the original homeland of Arab people and of Islam. The country's name is linked to the ruling family's name: Al Saud (Lacey, 1982). Saudi Arabia is the largest state in the Middle East and, because of its oil wealth, is a major force in the Arabic world (Walston, Al-Harbi and Al-Omar, 2008). Moreover, Saudi Arabia shares borders with: Jordan, Kuwait and Iraq in the North; Bahrain and Yemen in the South; Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Persian Gulf on the eastern borders; the Sultanate of Oman on the South-East frontier; and the Red Sea and the Aqaba Gulf in the West and North-East respectively (Mufti, 2000, p. 1).

Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia, is located in the middle of the Kingdom, in Najd province. Saudi Arabia is divided into five main regions: (1) Al-Wosttah in the centre; (2) the Hijaz region, also called "Algharbiah", in the West along the Red Sea containing the holy cities of Makkah (Mecca) and Madinah (Medina), the port city of Jeddah (the second largest city in Saudi Arabia after Riyadh) and Taif, the summer capital; (3) the Al-Sharghiyah region in the East; (4) Al-Janoob in the South; (5) and the Al-Shamal region in the Northern part of the Kingdom (see Figure 1.1) The country, however, has 14 administrative emirates.



Figure 1.1: Map of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Gulf insider, 2017)

The population of Saudi Arabia is approximately 32.5 million, of which 12.1 million are non-citizens (General Authority of Statistics, 2017). Most of the population falls within the age group between 35 and 39, with 42.9% being female and 57.1% male because of the high number of male expatriates working in the country (General Authority of Statistics, 2017).

When oil was discovered, the Saudi economy developed very quickly, and this has impacted positively on every aspect of Saudi Arabian society (WHO, 2006, p. 7). Remarkable developments took place and the development of industry, education and healthcare services, in particular, rapidly propelled the country towards the living standards of other industrialised countries (WHO, 2004).

In recent years, there has been a steady shift from rural to urban living; for example, Riyadh, the capital, has a population of 8.2 million (WHO, 2006; General Authority of Statistics, 2017). Currently the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a population which has embraced the ways of the modern world, while at the same time holding on firmly to its cultural traditions and values (WHO, 2002).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932 by Abdul-Aziz bin Saud (known as Ibn Saud in the West). The official language is Arabic and Islam the official religion (Altamimi, 2011). The majority of the Saudi Arabian population is Sunni and mainly follows the Hanbali School of Islamic Law (madhab). There is a small Shia minority (The Middle East Institute, 2009). The majority of immigrants are also Muslims. Non-Muslim faiths are not permitted to practice in Saudi Arabia (Al-Yassini, 1985). Saudi Arabia's government takes the form of an Islamic total monarchy. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia could also be known by the name of “The Land of the Two Holy Mosques” (in Arabic “Beladol haramain”) in reference to Mecca and Medina, the two holiest places in Islam; as Masjid al-Haram (in Mecca), and Al-Masjid al-Nabawi (in Medina).

The climate of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia varies from one region to another because of the varied topography and the influence of high tropical air. In general, however, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has cold winters and very hot summers. It is rainy during the winter mainly in the northern and southern areas (Lacey, 1982).

People around the world have different interpretations of what the country means to them: for example, for some it means the Homeland of Islam, a blessed and Holy Land, the Land of the Two Holy Mosques at Mecca and Medina. It may also be seen as the land of oil, wealth and money, while to others it is a land of deserts and is represented by the camel. Today, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has become well known as the world's single largest oil exporter, having about one third of the world's oil assets. It has the world's largest reserve oil pumping capacity (Appendix 1). The majority of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's income, about 85%, is gained from the oil industry (Al-Yousuf, 1999; and Elmadani, 1993). Before the discovery of oil, the Saudi Arabian economy was heavily reliant on the selling of sheep, goats and camels, simple agriculture and fishing. The discovery of oil in 1936 allowed Saudi Arabia to develop into a modern country, helping to create wealth and permitting the provision of free health care and education, as well as a tax-free society for its residents (Looney, 1990).

Differences in lifestyle are increasing as wealthy elites interact less commonly with middle-class people (Altamimi, 2011). Common beliefs, attitudes and practices are shared across economic divisions, which are also bridged by ties of relationship and religion (Niblock, 1982).

Strict gender segregation is authorised by the state and society in the country. Males and females, who are not banded from marriage by incest rules, should not interact in either group or individual settings (Altamimi, 2011). Women may work outside the home in settings where they do not have direct contact with unrelated men. Many women are teachers employed in girls' schools and the women's sections of universities, some are in social work and development programmes for women, others in banks which cater for female clients, medicine and nursing for women, television and radio programming, or computer and library work. Recently, sections of markets have been set aside for women cashiers. In 2013, the King of Saudi Arabia permitted

women to take part in Al-Shora Council, and women members currently comprise 20% of the overall Council membership (Alryiadh, 2013), despite the fact that only 7% of Saudi Arabia's formal workforce is female (Al-Munajjed, 1997).

It has long been argued that men have more rights than women in the country (Tjomsland, 2009; and Doumato, 2003). Women were not allowed to drive cars (until 2018) or motorcycles; cannot travel abroad without the permission or presence of a male guardian (mahram); are dependent on fathers, brothers or husbands to conduct almost all their private and public business; and have to wear a veil (Altamimi, 2011). Women's status is usually high within the family, especially in the role of mother or sister. In addition, a substantial number of women have had high levels of success in academia, business, literary production and other fields, compared to their male counterparts.

1.3 Islam in Saudi Arabia

Islam means: the act of 'total submission to the will of Allah - God' (Andrews and Boyle 2003, p. 476; Al-Shahri 2002, p. 134). Muslims believe in the Islamic faith and live according to the teachings of the Holy Book of Islam (Qura'n) (Andrews and Boyle 2003, p. 477; Al-Shahri 2002, p. 134).

Islam and Islamic leaders have been strongly enmeshed with Saudi leaders since the establishment of Saudi Arabia. Islam, therefore, has a great influence in almost every aspect of Saudi Arabia's social life and has become deeply involved in Saudi Arabian policy and politics (The Middle East Institute, 2009).

Culture is shaped by many factors such as race, religion, level of education, economic status and the environment (Helman 2002, p. 3). However, in Saudi Arabia there is a thin line between culture and Islamic religious practices, as religion shapes the culture of the Saudi Arabian population and Islamic principles pervade every aspect of Saudi Arabian daily life (Al-Shahri 2002, p. 133).

The governance and constitution in Saudi Arabia is based fundamentally on *Shariah* (Islamic Jurisprudence) as stated in the Quran, the *Hadeeth* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) and the *Sunnah* (actions and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad,

PUH) (Altamimi, 2011). Applying Shariah has promoted power and legitimacy for the Saudi Arabian state among other Gulf countries (Majlis Ash-Shura, 2014). The main ministers' meeting in Saudi Arabia is the *Shura* council meeting, which is an Islamic 'Shariah' ideology run by Muslim scholars for consultation (ibid., 2014). This council looks at laws proposed by the Council of Ministers and can suggest changes according to the Islamic perspective (Al-Yassini, 1985).

Islam has five pillars which constitute the basic religious duties that Muslims must perform. These five pillars are summaries on following the Hadeeth: *"Islam was built on five; the testimony that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah (Al-Shahadah), and held a prayer (Al-Salah), and the delivery of the zakat (Charity, or giving money yearly, like the concept of taxes, but to poor people), fasting Ramadan (complete abstention from food and drink and sexual intercourse, and avoiding looking at, talking or hearing inappropriate things from sunrise until sunset), and visiting the home of Islam (Mecca) for those who can afford it (pilgrimage)"*. These pillars shape Muslims' culture and produce a sense of well-being, fulfilment, health and a source of guidance for them (Leininger and McFarland, 2002).

In addition, Islam considers both men's and women's roles and rights in both the community and the family. It also discusses how the individual, family and community are all vital in Islam, which Muslims are asked to think about and to prioritize and it is specified that one should not be at the expense of the other in any matter (Al-Yassini, 1985).

In Islam, education is a requirement for every Muslim, both male and female as the Holy Qur'an and the Hadeeth [teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad] repeatedly emphasize the importance of learning (Syed, 2001). Therefore, in the centuries after the birth of Islam (632 AD), Muslim states established schools, universities and libraries that were unique in the world. In addition, the Islamic world became a centre for learning, making major contributions in the areas of Astronomy, Physics, Art, Philosophy and Medicine – a period known as the "Golden Age" (Bassiouni, 2012). Bassiouni also states that methods introduced by Muslim scholars

and scientists during the Golden Age became the foundation of the modern Sciences and were taught in European universities up to the 18th Century.

1.4 Women in Islam and Saudi Arabia

There are verses in the Quran and Hadeeth that encourage a woman to be the coordinator and leader in her home and encourage her to maintaining her chastity (Quran-Al-Ahzab-33). As a consequence, most scholars use this verse to argue that a woman should mainly stay at home but that she has the right to go out for justifiable needs, such as working to earn essential money, for learning, to worship, voluntary work and other reasons (Altamimi, 2011). However, different Muslim scholars, both in the past and current time, agree that leaving the house for a woman should be on an equivalent level with her leadership and motherhood role at home and that she must be careful that stepping out of her house does not become the reason for the ruination of her home, her family, her community or their reputations.

In the Quran there is a verse (Quran- Alnoor-31) which provides conditions that women should follow when there is a need to go out. These include wearing the “*Hijab*” as well as bashful, decent and modest dress that covers the entire body. It should not be see-through. It must also be wide so that her body is not revealed. Females are only allowed to remove the Hijab in front of “*Mahrms*”: that is her husband and men who cannot marry her such as brothers, uncles and fathers.

Women have also been discussed in Islam with regard to marriage. Muslim scholars claim that, before Islam, men were able to marry more than one wife, and as there was no obligation as to how many wives a man could have in any other religion, the number of wives was unlimited (Philips & Jones, 2005). In addition, they argue that Islam made it clear that this practice, polygamy, should be limited to four wives, and be allowed only for a reasonable purpose and when the man has the ability to ensure justice between the wives.

Muslim women are not responsible for earning money for the family or for expenditure. This is the husband or the father’s responsibility throughout a woman’s life, as in Islam, the male is considered to be in command of the family and is

obligated to take care of his wife financially, even if she is working or is rich (Altamimi, 2011). This highlights the responsibility of the man over the woman, “*Qawamah*”, which is supposed to redeem women's obedience to their husband on condition of their rights. Muslim scholars approve the importance of the full preference of men over women because of the many responsibilities that men carry out for the women, and for the family as a whole.

However, Muslim Arab women participated in all aspect of life: politically, socially, and economically: as Arebi (1994), the Islamic historian states, in 15 countries old traditions show many examples of independent Arab female entrepreneurs. Khadija, the first wife of the Prophet Mohammad, for example, was an independent entrepreneur and she continued her business after she married him (Arebi, 1994).

The position of women in Saudi Arabia could be affected by the fact that many Muslim scholars adopt an extreme interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah, which avoids any consideration of developing social contexts and resists any change, especially when it comes to issues such as dealing with women’s lives and behaviour (Hamdan, 2005). However, it is important to review some social and political events which took place in the past and to assess their relationship to the shaping of the position of Saudi Arabian women in society today.

In 1944 the American oil company ARAMCO (Arabian American Oil Company) was established in Dhahran, a city on the East coast of Saudi Arabia, where most of the American companies are located due to the richness of the oil fields there (ARAMCO, 2014). The American engineers and oil managers brought their families with them, resulting in the building of Western-style houses, schools, companies and compounds, as foreign labour migrants accounted for 43% of the total workforce in oil companies in the mid-1970s (Yamani, 1996). American women were shopping in malls, unveiled, and driving cars (something Saudi women were banned from doing) (Hamdan, 2005). Saudi women, therefore, began asking for some of these rights and some of these demands were formally discussed (Doumato, 2000).

In January 1979 the Iranian Shi'a revolution took place in Iran and the Iranian royals and the Shah were successfully defeated by religious clerics, resulting in the establishment of a new Islamic government in Iran (Lacey, 1981). This momentous event could have prompted the Saudi Arabian religious leadership to commit a similar act (Hamdan, 2005). As a result, as many analysts have discussed, the Mecca uprising took place in November 1979 which was an attempt to seize the Holy Mosque in Mecca, and to officially put an end to what they called "**Western influence**" (Yamani, 1996). This religious group believed that the discussions about increasing women's freedom, and mobility through education and work, were dangerous "**Western ideas**" right from the very beginning (Arebi, 1994). However, some historians argued that the Mecca siege was not all about women's rights and that it had a great deal to do with declaring religious views on all aspects of life (Hamdan, 2005). Nevertheless, after this incident, women's right to fully participate in the development of the nation was banned and television stations at that time were prohibited from broadcasting images of unveiled women (Arebi, 1994).

During and after the Gulf War of 1990, the American presence was highly noticeable in Riyadh, the capital city, and on the East coast close to the Saudi-Kuwaiti borders. Saudi women not only observed American women driving military cars in Riyadh and Dammam but also observed their Kuwaiti sisters - who had escaped their own country - enjoying a freedom denied to Saudi women themselves (Hamdan, 2005).

In March 2002, there was a fire in an Elementary Girl's School in Mecca which caused the death of 15 young girls. The Saudi Arabian press reported that the presence of religious police in the incident contributed to the high number of deaths amongst girls. The religious police, as witnessed by the press, discouraged the firemen from entering the girls' school, claiming that it would be sinful to approach both the girls and their teachers where they may not be wearing the **Hijab** (headscarf) or veil (Amarsi, 2003). This incident aroused public debate about the role of the religious police (Prokop, 2003). As a result, as Amarsi states (2003), many of the religious police's rights and responsibility have been reviewed and they have been officially forbidden to intervene in the work of fireman or police. Although their presence in public is currently limited, however, they frequently visit malls to ensure, and make, girls wear the Hijab. They also arrest individuals found in any suspicious

situation, as it is still not acceptable for females to meet males in public places for any reason unless they are accompanying their guardians.

In the work place women are still mixing with men, and that should not be a problem if the women are wearing their *Hijab* and react formally, although the Government is, however, trying to appease the cultural demands by separating all work places, if applicable: banks, universities, etc. Yet, some places cannot be gender segregated, such as the head offices of banks and hospitals. These places are designed especially for such mixing as, for example, the office partitions are made of glasses so when a meeting is undertaken everyone can see what is happening between men and women at all times. In fact, some mixed gender jobs require women to bring a signed consent from their guardians (husband, father, or brother) agreeing for them to work in such an environment.

While travelling to other countries is not an option for many Saudi Arabian women who cannot afford the expense of travelling - whether financially or the unavailability of a Mahram (male relative) - through technology the world has come to them. Satellite dishes and Internet access have allowed them to view others not only in Western and European nations but also in neighbouring countries (Hamdan, 2005). In addition, although Saudi Arabian women tend to be shy generally when it comes to interaction with men, and are most concerned that their identity should remain anonymous in order to protect their moral reputation and their family name, with the speed and anonymity characteristic of the Internet, Saudi women have nevertheless been encouraged to connect with others, creating a form of horizontal participation (Tadros, 2005). Moreover, Saudi Arabian women have found that the Internet can permit them to choose their own identities freely, since the identity of Saudi Arabian women offline is forced on them, as the compulsory hiding is a social control representing the lack of choice in the selection of identity (Moghadam, 2003). Therefore, Saudi Arabian girls tend to write online or on papers anonymously to express their ideas rather than talking, or being interviewed, as Al-Lily explains (2012). Furthermore, women have used social media to arrange to protest to gain the right to drive, as they started the campaign using Facebook, and on 26th October 2011 the women's protest took place in many Saudi Arabian cities (BBC, 2011). Campaigners have not called for a mass protest - which would be illegal - but have

asked women who have foreign driving licences to drive themselves as they go about their daily life (*ibid.*, 2011). Although, this movement did not end successfully, there were no reported arrests or punishments (*ibid.*, 2011).



Figure 1.2: Saudi women expressing their own ideas publicly (Youtube, 2013)



Figure 1.3: Famous Saudi female presenter on local channel (Mona Abo Suleiman) (Youtube, 2013)



Figure 1.4: A photo of the main electronic page of the Saudi Arabian newspaper Al-Riyadh, showing male columnists photos, while women columnists are portrayed as faceless shadows. (Tamimi, 2010)

Yamani (1996) presented a very interesting view about women in Hijaz (the western province of Saudi Arabia that contains Mecca, Jeddah and Medina) as they display a more heterogeneous character than that of other regions in the country. She suggests that as many Hijaz residents are immigrants, who moved after the Hajj from different parts of the world to become citizens of the holy land, they may have no tribal

background. Hijazi women are more readily able to go outdoors and express themselves publicly, a phenomenon reserved for men in other provinces characterised by a tribal background (Yamani, 1996).

1.5 The Education System in Saudi Arabia

1.5.1 General education system

Saudi Arabia has used a large proportion of its oil income to build schools, to establish communication networks, to improve housing and to provide electricity to remote rural areas. “Kuttab” was the only form of education known before the establishment of the Directorate General for Education in 1930, whereby teachers received their students in their homes or in the community mosques. In the morning, students would recite and memorize passages from the Qur’an. In the afternoon, they would learn to write, study Islamic prayers and rituals, as well as Arabic grammar and poetry (Thompson, 2014).



Figure 1.5: Kuttub (LANE603, 2012).

Even 20 years later, education was still very limited in quality and quantity because of the country’s large size and insufficient funding, resulting in a very high level of illiteracy, a lack of facilities and almost no qualified native teachers (Thompson, 2014). At that time the number of students was only 30,000 in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Education, 2014). After the establishment of the Ministry of Education in 1951, the number of students almost doubled in the following year.

Formal Primary Education had begun in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s, when the Directorate General for Education was established. By 1945, King Abdulaziz bin Abdelrahman Al-Saud, the country's founder, had begun an extensive programme to establish schools in the Kingdom. Six years later, in 1951, the country had 226 schools with 29,887 students. However, education was available to very few people, mostly the children of wealthy families living in the major cities (AlTamimi, 2011). Today, Saudi Arabia's education system includes 26 public and 10 private universities, and 42 private colleges with more planned; some 30,000 schools; and a large number of other educational institutions (Ministry of Education, 2017). The system is open to all citizens and provides students with free education, books and health services. Although the study of Islam remains at its core, the modern Saudi Arabian educational system also provides quality instruction in diverse fields of the Arts and Sciences. This diversity helps the Kingdom prepare its citizens for life and work in a global economy.

According to the website of the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education and the website of the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Education, 2014; and Saudi Arabian Embassy, 2013) general information about the Ministry of Higher Education is reported as follows: In 1951 the Ministry of Knowledge was established in the reign of King Saud bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, and has been assigned to the planning and supervision of public education for boys at three levels (Elementary - Intermediate - Secondary). King Fahd was the first Minister of General Education. However, in 1960 the establishment of the General Presidency for Girls' Education was founded in the reign of King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (budget of \$ 4,400,000) and after (15) elementary Schools and only one intermediate institute of parameters (an intermediate school to prepare teachers). With the development of general education, a Royal Order was issued to add the General Presidency for Girls' Education to the Ministry of Knowledge in 2002 to become one Ministry of general education for both boys and girls. One year later, the name of the Ministry of Knowledge was changed to the Ministry of Education. Then in 2015, the Ministries of Education and Higher Education were merged into one entity, named: the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2017).

General education in the Kingdom consists of kindergarten, six years of primary school (children have to start Year One at the age of six), three years of intermediate and three years in secondary. After elementary and intermediate school, students can choose whether to attend a High School with programs in Commerce, the Arts and Sciences, or a vocational school. In High School students take comprehensive exams twice a year under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.

The educational curricula at Saudi Arabian schools are diverse. They include a variety of subjects such as Mathematics, Science, Literature, History, Arabic and Islam. The Ministry of Education sets the overall standards and oversees special education for the handicapped. The government has continued to improve educational standards by offering quality training programmes for teachers, improving standards for student evaluation and increasing the use of educational technology. For example, in 2000 Computer Science was introduced at Secondary level. In addition, English Language (as a foreign language) has been introduced to Year Four at Primary school in the last two years, instead of starting English learning at the Intermediate level. The administration of the educational system has also been improved by giving provincial school boards greater decision-making authority. These concerted efforts may have resulted in an increase in the number of Saudi Arabian schools as well as the actual quality of education.

1.5.2 Higher education system

The Ministry of Higher Education was established in 1975 to oversee the application of the national higher education policy (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). The Minister of Higher Education is responsible for the implementation of the government policy for university education. University education has received generous support, making available new universities, colleges of Science and applied subjects, and they have been allocated huge budgets. The 26 Saudi Arabian government universities, 10 private universities and 42 private colleges all host a plethora of disciplines, which are not merely academic. The Ministry of Higher Education is adopting contemporary methods in scientific research and strategic planning. Those working in higher education have been at pains to recognize the constant changes confronting this field,

from privatization through to financing and foreign competition, as well as the fluctuating requirements of the labour market (Ministry of Education, 2017). The authorities have reverted to preparing for these changes by forward planning and well thought out handling of all the parameters; resulting in expansion, self-evaluation, the initiation of specific programs and the creation of organisations which focus on both local and global endeavours. The establishments provided by the Ministry of Higher Education are as follows: four governmental universities were established initially in Saudi Arabia; King Saud University, King Abdulaziz University, King Faisal University, and King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals. The oldest and largest university in Saudi Arabia is the King Saud University (KSU). Previously called Riyadh University, it was established in 1957 and caters for both genders. However, King Abdulaziz University, founded in Jeddah in 1967 by a group of local businessmen and originally designed with the help of American academics, was subsequently taken over by the Government in 1971 (Rugh, 2002), and also has a considerable joint gender enrollment. King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals was established in Dahrhan (the oil-rich area in the Eastern Province) in 1963 but caters solely for males, while King Faisal University, established in Al-Hassa in 1957, enrolls both genders (*ibid.*, 2002).

In addition to these first top universities, there are three major Islamic universities. The first is Imam Muhammad bin Saud University, established in Riyadh in 1947, during the period when a number of older Islamic institutes and colleges were combined (Rugh, 2002). The second is the Islamic University of Medina which was established in 1961, and primarily serves non-Saudis wishing to study Islam (Islamic University, 2013). The third university with a predominantly deeply Islamic curriculum is Umm Al-Qura University in Mecca, which grew out of two older Mecca institutions: the Shariah College (founded in 1949) and the Teacher's College (established in 1952) (Rugh, 2002). However, recently Umm Al-Qura University has increased the number of courses it offers, to cover not only Religion and Arabic but the Sciences as well.

In the past decade, public universities have increased from seven in 2003 to 26 in 2010 (Alshayea, 2012) and to 27 in 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2017), which shows the rapid rate of development in Saudi Arabian Higher Education offering

Undergraduate, Masters and PhD programmes. Generally, learning in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia lasts five years in the field of the Humanities and the Social Sciences (including the preparation year, where students have to attend and pass exams, after which, based on their grades, they can choose which field they wish to study). This rises to six or seven years of study in the field of Medicine, Engineering and Pharmacy (including the preparation year).

However, because of the increasing level of school graduates and the limited places available in universities, the minimum grades required to enter a college or university have been raised and some school graduates even with 80% passes are currently unable to find university places (Rugh, 2002). In addition to the high grade requirements, after secondary school graduation students must also pass **Qiyas** exams, and then a calculation has to be done for every student to determine their final grades: (High School total grades * 50%) + (Qudorat test [Arabic language skills and Mathematical skills test]* 30%) + (Achievement test [to test students' skills on their school subjects] * 20%) = minimum 80% (KAU, 2014).

Therefore, some colleges and departments provide distance learning for those who have not been able to find a place at university. In addition, in 2011, the first e-learning governmental university was established under the title, the Saudi Electronic University (SEU), to offer web-based undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (still not fully distance learning as at the moment students have to sometimes attend face-to-face lectures at its official centres located around the Kingdom) (SEU, 2014).

It is free to study at a state university with the government paying each student up to 1000 SR \approx £164 per month (Al-Twajjry, 2010). However, Al-Twajjry also states that both Arabic and English are used as a means of instruction at universities, and that the predominant teaching style is mostly traditional didactic, where the lecturers or tutors do almost the all talking and explaining, whereas students are the listening audience. Government regulations do not allow female instructors to teach male students whereas the opposite is possible but only through video conferencing (Al-Lily, 2012).

Generally, a high percentage (an average of 85%) of course assessment is based on examination results and the remaining (15%) on homework, attendance and projects (Al-Twajjry, 2010). However, the pass rate is 60%, and if a student cannot collect a total of 60 out of 100 points on a course, she or he will fail this course and must restudy it. However, there is no limit to retakes for a course as long as the total GPA is at the required level (2.00 or above out of 5.00), and if the GPA goes below 2.00 the student loses her or his academic reward (the monthly 1,000 SR will not be paid). In addition, if the GPA remains under 2.00 for 3 (sometimes 5) sequential semesters (terms), the student must leave the university (Al-Twajjry, 2010).

Higher Education					
<u>Percent</u>	<u>Letter</u>	<u>5-point scale</u>	<u>4-point scale</u>	<u>Remark</u>	<u>Translation</u>
90–100	A	4.0–5.0	3.6–4.0	ممتاز	Excellent
80–89	B	3.0–3.9	2.6–3.59	جيد جدا	Very Good
70–79	C	2.0–2.9	1.6–2.59	جيد	Good
60–69	D	1.0–1.9	1.0–1.59	مقبول/ضعيف	Pass, Weak
0–59	F	0.0–0.9	0.0–0.99	راسب	Fail

Figure 1.6: Grading system employed in Saudi Arabian universities (Morawski, 2010).

Moreover, according to the 2007 “Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study” (TIMSS) undertaken by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, based on an international evaluation of 50 countries, the educational system in Saudi Arabia was found to be falling behind European, Asian, American, and other Arab countries in Mathematics and the Sciences. It scored 46th place out of 49 in Mathematics and 44th place out of 49 in the Sciences. Saudi Arabian students scored an average of 329 points, which was well below the world average of 500 points (UNDP, 2008).

1.5.3 Educational technology in Saudi Arabia

The effort to implement Educational Technology in Saudi Arabia has always been a major priority (Al-shbeyaan, 2012). Al-shbeyaan explained that educational technology started with the establishment of a small audio-visual unit within the Ministry of Education in 1959. Then, in the same year, there was a report by the International Yearbook of Education concerning the introduction of a small audio-

visual production programme. However, between 1964 and 1971 major change took place in Saudi Arabian education and the following educational technologies were implemented: the introduction of a graphic and illustrations unit for the limited production of slides, photography, filmstrips, transparencies and silk screen prints (Moshaikeh, 1992). Yet, to implement Educational Technology, the Saudi Arabian Government sought foreign expert recommendations and co-operation, such as Wade Media Consultant Inc. in 1973, and Indiana University in 1975 (Abdul Hannan, 2013).

The introduction and use of Educational Technology in Saudi Arabian education was introduced by several means such as teacher training programmes as well as through the development and implementation of new methods of instruction. In addition, new software materials have been developed and implemented, and are made available to the public by being broadcast via radio and television stations (Moshaikeh, 1992).

The most recent advances in the use of Educational Technology in Saudi Arabia includes the establishment of E-Learning Deans in several Saudi Arabian universities in the past decade (Aldraiby, 2010; KAU, 2014) as well as a National Center for E-Learning and Distance Learning (Estimo, 2014).

1.6 Women's Education in Saudi Arabia

The first government school for girls was built in 1964, but by the end of the 1990s girls' schools had been established in every part of the Kingdom. Today, female students make up over half of the more than 6 million students currently enrolled in Saudi Arabian schools and universities (Information Office of the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2013).

Formal public schooling for girls in Saudi Arabia was initiated in the 1960s and the first official primary school was established in Riyadh (Al Munajjed, 1997). Prior to this, informal schooling took place aiming to teach religion, focusing on how to pray and to follow the rules of Muslim behaviour, as these tasks required memorization but not necessarily reading (Domato, 2000). Girls' schooling started informally during the King Saud era. Later, in 1963 the Government (during the King Faisal era) had to

send official forces to break up demonstrations in Buraydah when protesters had heard that the education of women would be mandatory (Lacey, 1981). However, King Faisal (the King following on from King Saud) supported a woman's right to an education, but he was not able to convince his public on this right initially. For this reason, he did not force parents to take their daughters to school, though he ruled that the schooling of girls should be mandatory and obligatory. Thus far there is no law in the Kingdom which prohibits male guardians (brother or father, for instance) from taking girls out of school.

The traditional Saudi Arabian religious scholars have approved the education of girls providing certain conditions are met: girls' schools are surrounded by high walls and backup screens behind the entry area; each school, college or university is assigned at least two men who are responsible for checking the identity of those who enter the school, delivering and picking up the mail, and guarding the school until girls are picked up by their fathers or brothers (Hamdan, 2005). However, the public eventually adopted a generally favorable position toward the enrolment of girls in school. By 1981 the number of girls enrolled in school was almost equal to the number of boys (Alireza, 1987).

Although Saudi Arabian scholars rejected female education in Saudi Arabia based on the fact that the main purpose of educating girls is to teach them Islamic doctrine and to be a good mother (Prokop, 2003), the Saudi Arabian government currently supports the public system of female education in Saudi Arabia (Altamimi, 2011) and girls learn Science, Language, and other subjects as well as Religious Studies. However, the girls' curricula at the Primary, Intermediate and Secondary levels are dominated by Religious Studies and Arabic language (Al Munajjed, 2009). Nevertheless, Mathematics, Sciences, Foreign Languages, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are falling behind (*ibid.*, 2009). Moreover, schools at the Primary and Intermediate levels are not equipped with computers and girls do not use the Internet. However, only four years ago the use of computers was initiated at the girls' Secondary level, but to a lesser degree than in boys' schools. English language classes were only introduced in 2007 at the Elementary level (two hours per week) and are lagging at the Intermediate and Secondary levels (Al Munajjed, 2009). Furthermore, Home Economics (two hours per week) is cooking, cleaning, laundering and sewing

classes that seem to have no educational value. History and Geography classes are limited and do not incorporate a broad overview of the Arab region and the world (AlMunajjed, 2009). When compared to the boys' curriculum, the girls' curriculum also lacks Administrative and Business Studies, Accounting, general activities, Physical Education and national education (AlMunajjed, 2009).

Physical education is non-existent for Saudi Arabian girls in schools at all educational levels. Sports are considered to be incompatible with local traditions and customs. Therefore, Saudi Arabian females have worryingly high rates of obesity (51 per cent) and osteoporosis (67 per cent) due to the lack of physical activity and exposure to the sun, respectively (Al Shark Al Awssat newspapers, 2006). When the issue of physical education was discussed in the Shoura Council, 75 members out of 120 expressed the opinion that the decision should be a political one (CEDAW, 2007). However, from September 2017, the Ministry of Education implemented classes of physical education to be gradually introduced to girls' public schools (McKernan, 2017).

Extracurricular and general activities are also missing in most parts of the girls' curricula, including cultural and educational trips to museums and archaeological sites, cooperation with other universities, schools and libraries; as well as education about social issues and health care (AlMunajjed, 2009).

However, at the higher educational level, the first university to have a women's campus was King Saud University in Riyadh, which opened in 1979 for women, offering only the following subjects: Arabic, English, History and Geography (Hamdan, 2005). In the 1980s King Saud University added further colleges for women, with courses teaching Public Administration, Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing and Education. The Jeddah campus of King Abdulaziz University admitted women to Economics in 1967 and the Dammam City campus of the King Faisal University opened a centre for women in 1978 with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Agriculture, Nutrition, Home Economics and Education (Hamdan, 2005).

At all universities, women have attended segregated campuses and subjects have been more limited than those offered for men (Hamdan, 2005). Women are not admitted to

study Petroleum and Minerals subjects, but women may study Business and Management, Computing, Science, Medicine, Linguistics, Nursing and Pharmacology, for example, and since 2018 (Alriyadh, 2018), women can now study Engineering.

At a very fundamental level, female students suffer a lack of equal opportunity with men in obtaining scholarships to study abroad, as the Ministry of Higher Education requires women to be accompanied by a male relative when travelling outside the country (Altamimi, 2011). In addition, a woman needs to have a Guardian's consent to be granted a scholarship to study abroad (Al Hamed et al., 2007). This may not be an issue for wealthy families, as they can send their daughters to study abroad at their own expense without having a male to accompany them, but they still have to show the Government that the guardians are in agreement.

Today, with the majority of Saudi Arabian women being educated and illiteracy declining, uneducated women will soon be a small minority. With the reform of the educational system for girls, education has become a priority as well as a great challenge for the Saudi Arabian Government (Ministry of Education, Statistical Report, 1426-27). There are more than 38 educational institutes for women in the Kingdom and eight universities for women are directly under the patronage of the Ministry of Education.

Women represent more than 58 per cent of the total number of Saudi Arabian university students. At the same time, the private sector has launched a number of private schools and universities for girls and women, based on the efforts of individuals or private institutions and under the supervision of the Ministry of Education spreading throughout the major cities including Riyadh, Al Khobar, Jeddah and Al Baha (Altamimi, 2011).

A strong teaching and scientific research approach is therefore necessary in the field of women's public education. Opportunities for cross disciplinary education and research with other international universities, as well as the use of international expertise, are not broadly available (Hamdan, 2005).

As Batrawy reported (2013): Women at Saudi Arabia's universities, within their female-only campuses, set free and act loose; as they wear colourful tops, trendy sneakers, a myriad of hairstyles, some experiment with bleached blonde or even dip-dyed blue hair and the more adventurous ones have cropped their hair into short buzzes. In their bags, the textbooks vary, but one item is mandatory: a floor-length black '*abaya*' robe that each must cover herself with when she steps through the university gates back to the outside world of the Kingdom (Batrawy, 2013). Batrawy added: in the campus grounds, a world of strictly female teachers, students and staff, women have some greater freedoms than outside, where females remain bound by a web of customs and religious strictures (Figure 1.7 and 1.8).

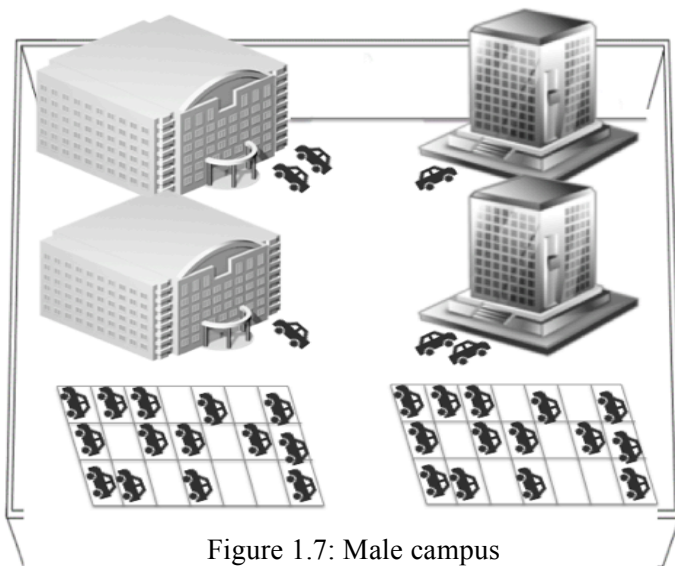


Figure 1.7: Male campus

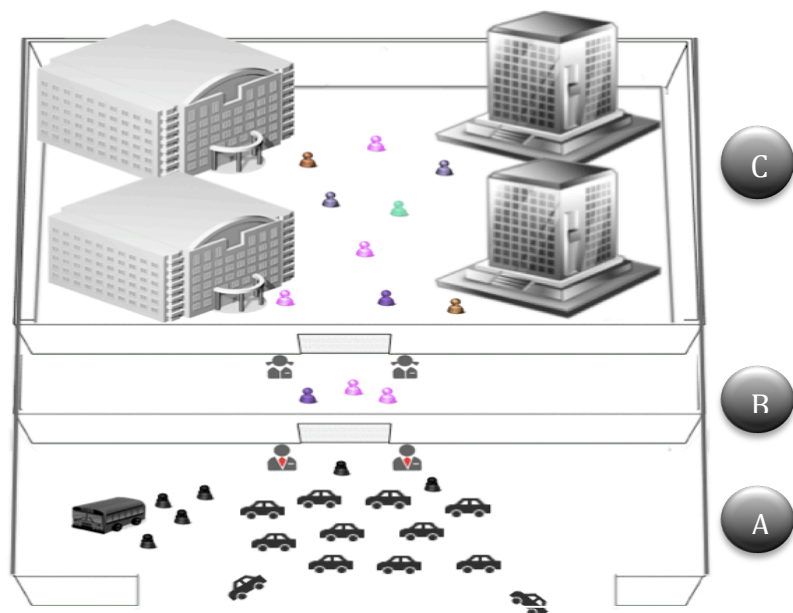


Figure 1.8: Female campus

Inside the faculties, there are lecture theatres and classes for students, laboratories and computer pools. In addition, female students are attending different types of lectures in Saudi Arabian universities, for example: face-to-face lectures, and CCTV lectures (Al Lily, 2012). CCTV lectures (live broadcasting lectures) were implemented because of the shortage of qualified female lecturers in many fields. This meant, therefore, that Saudi Arabian universities had to employ male lecturers to teach female students, but because Saudi Arabian Law does not permit male academics to enter the female campus to teach women face to face, many methods of teaching have been implemented in Saudi Arabian universities such as CCTV lectures to overcome this difficulty (Figures 1.9 and 1.10).

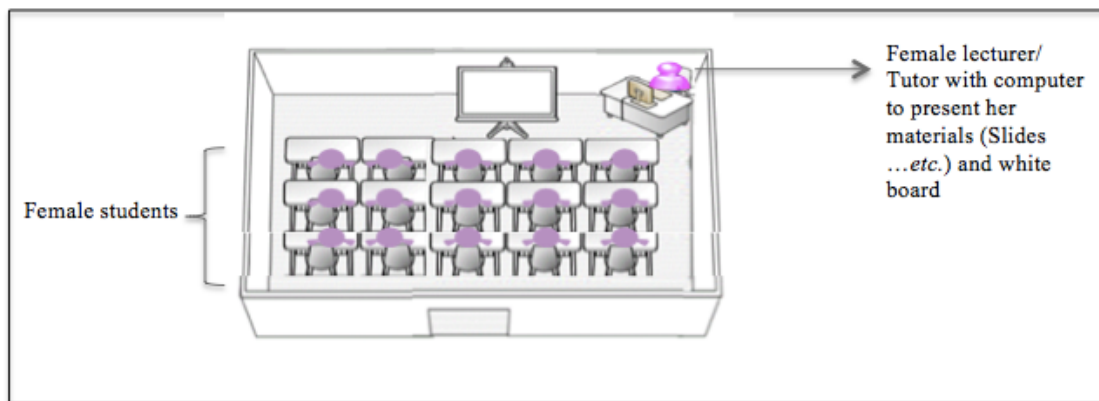


Figure 1.9: Female's face-to-face lectures

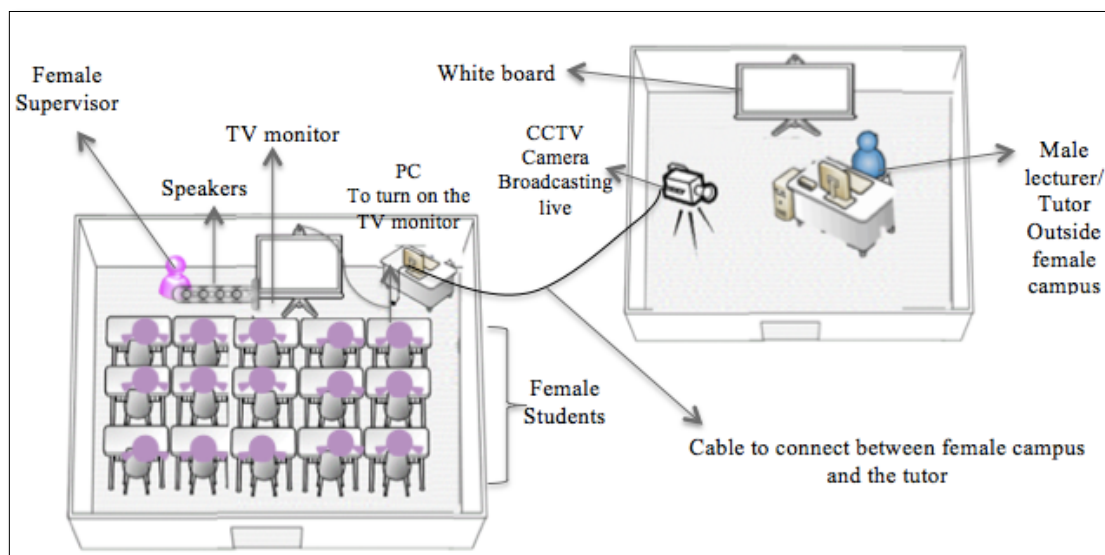


Figure 1.10: CCTV lectures

In CCTV lectures a female supervisor has to attend alongside the female students to maintain order in the classroom, to turn on/off the TV monitor, to register attendance, and to coordinate with the male tutor (female supervisors are the eyes of the male tutor in the class, therefore there is a trust relationship between the male tutor and the female supervisors as they report all incidents in the class to the male tutor). In the CCTV lectures students can hear and see the male tutor, and in fact, the male tutor can direct the broadcasting as he can change the TV view from his slides to his face and to the white board. Female students can interact with their male tutor through microphones.

However, in some cases the male tutor could be working in two campuses, at universities that have two campuses (male and female), such as King Abdulaziz University and King Faisal University, therefore that tutor can lecture both male and female students at the same time using CCTV lectures (Figure.1.11).

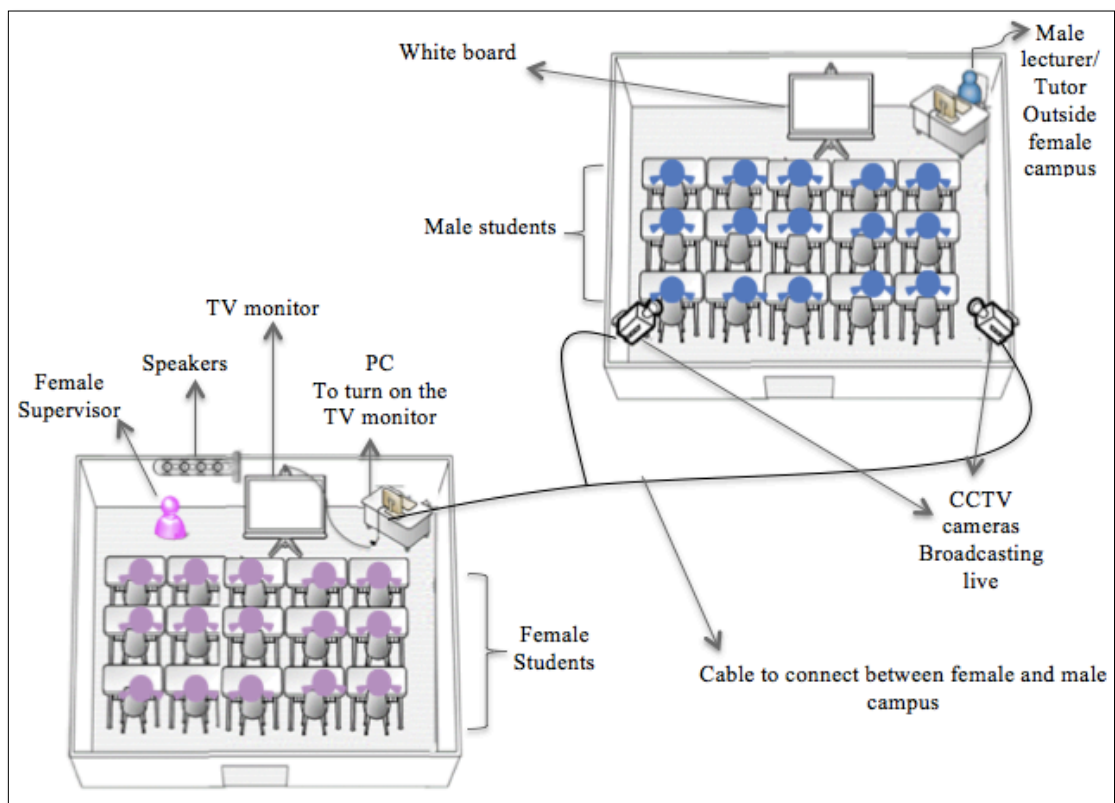


Figure 1.11: CCTV lectures for both genders at the same time.

Moreover, at King Saud University, males may tutor females by another method, as the male lecturer can be physically in the same classroom with the female students, but he cannot see them because of a one-way glass wall separating the two parties (Figure 1.12).

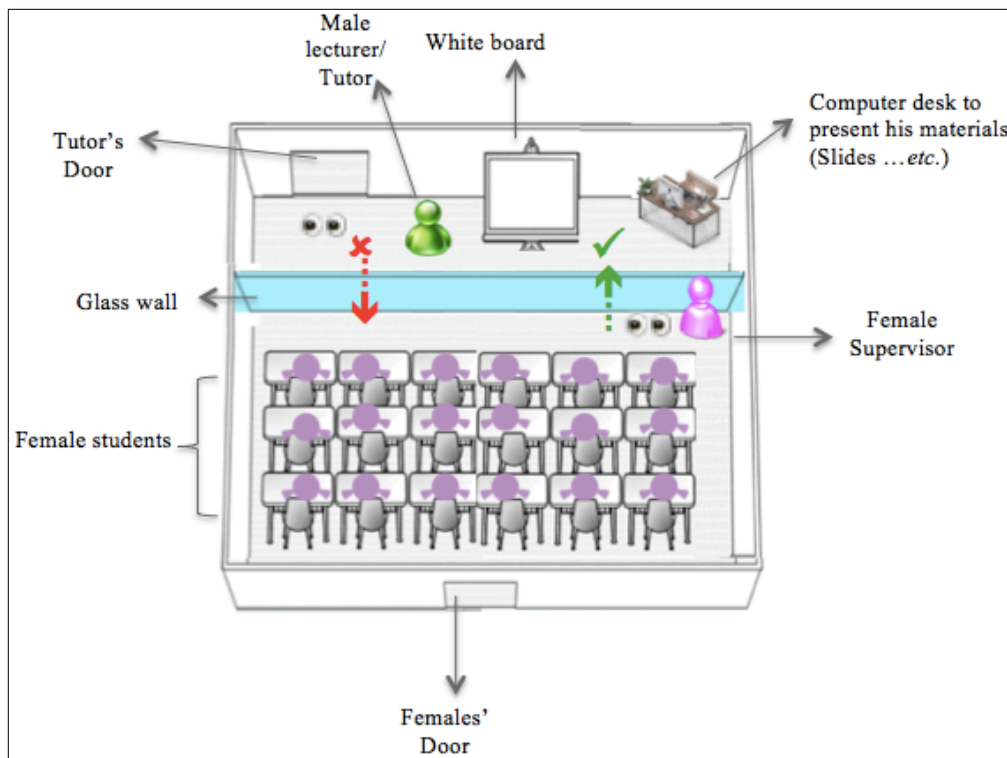


Figure 1.12: Glass wall classroom

This glass wall is there to conserve female privacy. In addition, females can see the tutor through this one-way glass wall, but the opposite is not true. Therefore, students can enjoy freedom in the class and can take off their ‘Abaya’ since the male tutor cannot see them. Moreover, the students and the tutor in this type of lecture can interact directly without the need for microphones and speakers since they are both physically in the same lecture hall. Although visibility through the glass wall is one way only, on the side of the female students the female supervisor makes sure that the lights are off as it is claimed that if the light is turned on this might allow the male tutor to see the girls (Al Lily, 2012). There is a postbox in the glass wall allowing the tutor, the female supervisor and the students to exchange documents, written messages, letters and other post.

Moreover, while female students cannot meet face to face with their male tutors in Saudi Arabian universities, female students can contact their male academics using landline telephone extensions, which are provided to each male tutor during office hours; emails, or by a virtual learning environment such as the Blackboard (Al Lily, 2012).

1.7 Princess Norah bint Abdul Rahman University for Women

King Abdullah laid the foundation for the Princess Noura bint Abdul Rahman University for Women in October 2008. The university was designed to be one of the largest centres of Higher Education for Saudi Arabian women (AlMunajjed, 2009). It includes an academic area of 15 colleges: the respective Colleges of Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacology, Physiotherapy, Business and Administrative Sciences, Computer and Technology, Kindergarten College, Science College, Languages and Translation, Arts and Literature, Community Service, Education, and Art and Design (PNU, 2014). It includes a housing area for staff and students, with public facilities including mosques, schools, sports gym, girls' football stadium (the first in Saudi Arabia), mall, restaurants, 700-bed hospital and an internal metro network linking all the important facilities at the University. This network is the world's first metro system laid out entirely within a university campus. The trains operate at up to 60 km/h, with automatic control, as there are no drivers operating the trains but instead a control room on the campus to permit the trains to be operated remotely by female operators (Railway Gazette, 2012). This first female University City has capacity for 40,000 female students and has been assigned a building budget of \$5 billion USD (Jabaji, 2008).

1.8 Conclusion

It is clear that the Saudi Arabian Government is keen to improve the quality of girls' education and Princess Norah bint Abdulrahman University is one example of this. The progression of educational reform has already started and is being supervised by a high-level committee, consisting of academics, experts and members of the Shoura Council. These reforms are, however, still at the initial, exploratory stage and it may take years before their impact is clearly evident.

The learning experience of female students (undergraduates) at public universities is mostly reported through newspapers and commentary articles. Nevertheless, the voice of students and their opinions remains hidden. This study has, therefore, focused on the female students' points of view regarding their learning experience and has discussed their learning issues and any obstacles (if they existed), which could reveal issues that may influence and help to improve the progression of female education.

The next chapter will outline the main concepts and ideas about the quality of the learning experience based on the available literature to provide a rationale for this study.

Chapter 2:

Background of the Quality of Learning Experience

2.1 Introduction

This chapter starts by introducing the complex meaning of learning experience and uses the history of the development of such a term as evidence of how these literature reviews have been reached. Subsequently, this chapter will proceed to reveal the gap in knowledge and explain how this proposed PhD research filled such a gap.

2.2 Learning experience: meaning and definition

Currently, the student learning experience is high on the political and policy agenda, as policy makers and organisations, such as the Higher Education Committee, identify it as a top priority (Ertl *et al.*, 2008). This interest in the student learning experience has many reasons behind it, related both to systemic and institutional change within the higher education sector, as within the higher education sector, the growth in student numbers and the increasing number and types of institutions offering higher education courses since the 1960s (Committee on Higher Education 1963) has largely changed the structure of the institutional setting and student body. Such expansion is linked to changes in teaching, learning and curriculum, which would affect student learning (Trow, 2006). In addition to this there have been growing institutional concerns about the student ‘satisfaction’, related to the growing competition between universities (David and Clegg, 2006).

Nowadays, the research community remains undecided on underlying definitions and conceptualizations for the student learning experience, as there is no clear understanding of how the student learning experience can be measured and evaluated. However, from 2005-2010 the British Higher Education Academy, in its Strategic Plan, identifies the student learning experience as a fundamental key concept for its work (Ertl *et al.*, 2008).

In addition, the term ‘Quality of learning experience (QLE)’ was firstly introduced by Neumann in 1990. He defined it as follows (Charkhabi, Abarghuei and Hayati, 2013):

“It is student’s perceptions of the direct and indirect inputs that they receive from their college. Direct inputs mean, college investments in the educational program in terms of content, resources and flexibility, whereas indirect inputs consist of the processes by which colleges attempt to enhance learning, for example, student-faculty contact and intrinsic involvement in academic programs.”

(Neumann, 1990)

Before Neumann’s definition, traditional approaches used to be conducted to understand and to study students’ development and students’ learning. These approaches treat the student as a type of “**Black Box**” (Neumann, 1990). On the one side of this black box are the inputs of the college (for example, requirements and courses), and on the other side of this box are the diverse educational outcomes (shown as academic achievements, for instance). However, in 1984, Astin studied student’s learning development by implementing three implicit theories, which guide the action of college personnel and college professors (Neumann and F. Neumann, 1993).

2.3 Background and conceptual frameworks

The first conceptual framework, which Astin used, was the “**subject content theory**” (Astin, 1984). This theory explains that student learning and development is based on exposing the right subject matter and the right course content. The key features of this theory relate to the quality of the academic course, the quality of teaching using instructional (pedagogical) abilities and the value of the actual components of an academic program (required and elective courses).

The second approach to student development surrounds the “**resources**” (Cameron, 1981): namely, that if adequate resources are available for an academic program, student learning and development will result. The most influential related resources for undergraduate programs are seen to be class sizes, the quality of libraries available and good access to computer research facilities.

The third conceptual framework focuses on the flexibility of the individualised components of the academic program in order to meet the needs of the student

(Chickering, 1981). This approach highlights self-directed learning, electives, the role of independent study and self-paced instruction.

These three theories (content – resources - and flexible learning) will enhance student learning and development, as Astin (1984) suggested. He also added that these theories could be linked to student output (that is learning) through *student involvement* (student energy that is invested in various academic objectives) and *student-faculty* contact.

Consequently, Neumann (1990) later combined all of these approaches into one term “*the quality of learning experience*” and developed a model called the Quality of Learning Experiences which included five learning experience components: resources, content, learning flexibility, student-faculty contact and student involvement. These components can be regarded as the major determinants of various student outcomes at a college, including a student’s satisfaction, perceived performance and accomplishment, as well as a student’s commitment; and also student’s grades (Figure. 2.1).

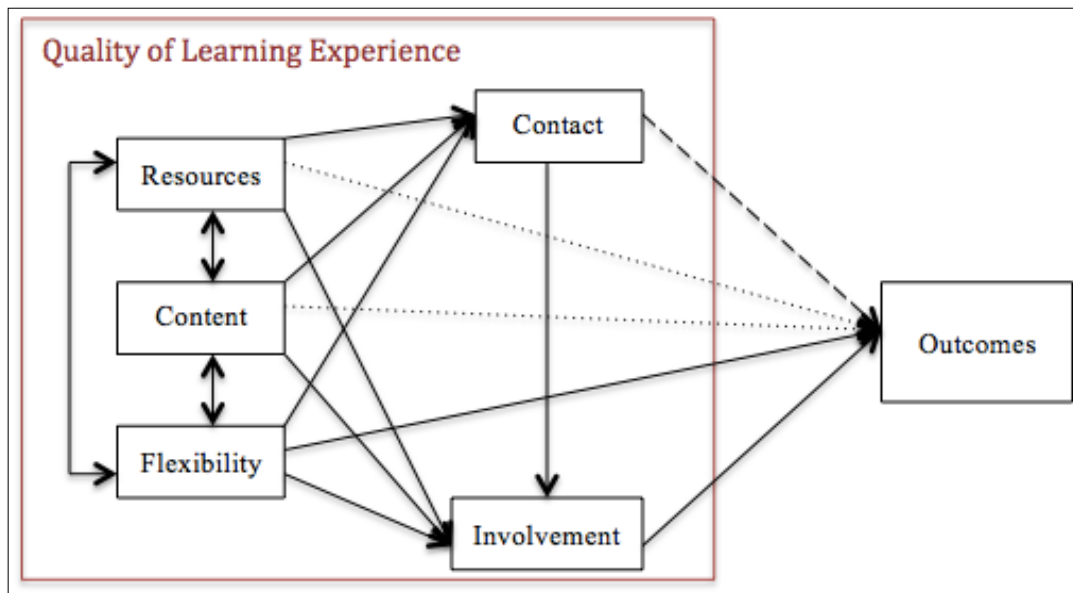


Figure 2.1: The Quality of Learning Experience and Student’s College Outcomes (Neumann, 1990)

Figure 2.1 illustrates Neumann’s model of the Quality of Learning Experience and its relation to the student’s college outcomes. It shows that both flexibility (direct and indirect) and involvement have maximal causal effect on students’ college outcomes;

whereas student-faculty contact has medium causal effect; and both resources and content have negligible causal effect. Moreover, these five components of the quality of learning experience have various causal effects on the outcomes, as shown in Figure 2.2.

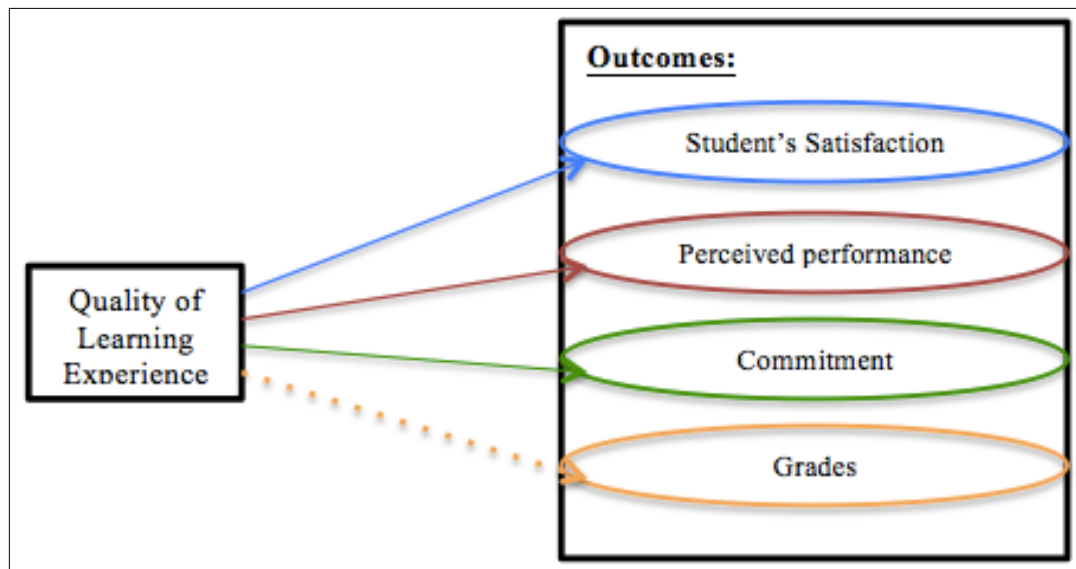


Figure 2.2: The Quality of Learning Experience effects on Student's College Outcomes (Neumann, 1993)

The causal effect of the quality of learning experience indicators on Grades is the weakest, while the main effect of these indicators on other outcome elements (student's satisfaction, perceived performance and commitment) is stronger.

Within educational development discussions there has also been a change in the pedagogical viewpoint from a focus on what creates good teaching (including teaching methods in higher education; the training and development of higher education tutors); to a focus on learning (Gibbs, 2003).

Historically, research pertaining to student learning has identified three main "traditions" (Ertl and Wright, 2008):

1- Approaches to learning (1970s): Marton and his research team identified different levels of understanding shown by undergraduate students, which they called 'deep' and 'surface' approaches to learning (Marton and Saljo, 1976). These two approaches appeared to match different conceptions of learning and the role of the learner (Kolb,

1984). Subsequently, Entwistle, an educational psychologist, developed scales for measuring student achievement in 1975. However, he worked with Biggs in 1979 to develop an understanding of learning systems or environment (Ramsden, 2003). Later, a group of Australian scholars, including Prosser and Trigwell, developed the field of 'approaches to learning' and found what they called 'outcome space of learning' by studying specific aspects of concepts of the teaching environment and how these related to learning (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999).

2- The second tradition of researching student learning is the exploration of the factors influencing learning that lie behind teacher-student interaction, formal/informal academic work, as well as institutional and disciplinary cultures. Pierre Bourdieu (1988) investigated how curricular knowledge relates to identities and relationships in the educational context, i.e. the introduction of habitus (Bernstein, 1996), which later prompted the growing interest in 'communities of practice'. However, 'situated learning theory' has emerged to position the 'community of practice' as the context in which an individual develops the practices (including values, norms and relationships) and identities appropriate to that community (Ertl and Wright, 2008). Yet, Handley and her colleagues (Handley et al., 2006) argued the need to analyze the (individual) situated learning and knowledge transfer (across communities) thus requiring not only a conceptualization of 'community of practice', but also an understanding of what happens within and beyond such communities. They argued that the cultural richness of this broader context produces a flexibility and heterogeneity within communities, which contradicts the idealization of communities as cohesive, homogenous 'social objects'. Handley with her team considered the usage of the terms 'participation' and 'practice' in the communities of practice literature, arguing that these terms are ambiguous because of important overlaps in meaning. They thus suggested possibilities for redefinition in order to improve conceptual clarity.

However, in this tradition of research into learning experience, sociologists of knowledge have been interested in the role that academic cultures and disciplinary identities contribute in shaping knowledge production to form what Becher (1989) called 'Tribes and Territories'. As part of this association, Huber and Morreales (2001) encouraged teachers to reflect disciplinary pedagogies.

3- A few researchers have explored the possibility of bringing these two approaches together (Ashwin and McLean, 2005), where quality assurance systems have emerged. Many researchers have been calling for quality assurance in higher education to take the students' perspectives into account (Coates, 2005).

Following this historical explanation of the development of the field of 'student learning experience', one can argue that the term 'learning experience' has a vast research base and no researcher has (theoretically) gathered all these concepts under one definition of learning experience. Consequently, the next part, of the literature review, could seem not to be linked and to have no clear guidelines throughout its themes, as - based on the history of developing the 'learning experience' - the researcher did not know in which direction this PhD could lead her. Therefore, it was with general background literature that the researcher started her fieldwork data collection. Reviewing the existing literature was part of building her understanding, as during data collection, each new concept or new theory emerged, and the researcher had to refer back to literature to understand it, and then perused her investigation to construct a deep and full understanding of her exploratory PhD. However, the role of reviewing the literature will be discussed in more detail in the Methodology Chapter.

2.4 Review of the related literature

2.4.1 Learning environment

'Learning environment' as a term has been discussed and generally seen as unlimited and unspecified educational places, aspects and activities (Grabinger and Dunlap, 1995). It is usually interpreted to give different meanings, based on the context where it is researched and used, as for some researchers it is the physical spaces where learning activities take place, while others see it as a set of online learning conditions and supportive information technology (Koper, 2000). Therefore, based on the definitions and the empirical focus of the research conducted, learning environment can be outlined into three different groups. These groups were identified by Abualrub *et al.* (2013), and this has influenced the following section of the literature:

2.4.1.1 Learning environment as a pedagogical perspective:

This group of studies can also be called teaching-learning settings, as it includes the relationship between the students and the teacher, the students' relationships with each other, learning supportive technologies, students' learning motivations and approaches, the atmosphere in which learning and teaching takes place and the students' perceptions of it, the development of the curriculum to meet specified outcomes and the possibility of the connection between learning outcomes and learning environment (Adams and Granic, 2009; and Petegem and Donche, 2006).

For example, a teacher or a tutor appears to affect the approaches students' use to access their learning materials, so when tutors are more involved and more oriented towards the students, students tend to use deep approaches in their learning (Garrison and Cleveland-Innes, 2005). Thus, Garrison and Cleveland-Innes's study looked mainly at the nature of learning approaches without considering particular sub-groups of students, who may encourage or discourage the implementation of deep learning approaches indirectly or directly through the students' perceptions of learning. However, Valk and Marandi (2005) considered students' perception of teaching behaviour (such as giving feedback, answering students' questions, structuring the course, illustrating lectures, and providing materials) and they found that these perceptions contribute to the use of the deep approach to learning. In addition, many researchers confirmed that students would reach a deep approach to learning by the involvement of the following factors: students should be satisfied with the course quality (Diseth *et al.*, 2010), the suitability of the amount of information (Svirko and Mellandy, 2008) and the appropriateness of the workload (Diseth *et al.*, 2006), the clarity of goals (Valle *et al.*, 2009) and usefulness of the course text book (Nijhuis *et al.*, 2005). Yet, in this respect it would be helpful to understand what workload and what information load is appropriate for students to approach deep learning.

The students' characteristics, also, have an impact on student learning; as the older the students are, and the more their personality is receptive to experience and emotional stability, the more they use the deep learning approach (Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham, 2009 & Chamorro-Premuzic *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, students use a deep approach when they feel self-confident and experience high self-efficacy (Wilson, 2009). However, the term '**deep learning approach**' refers to substantial interest in

the task, intention to understand, using evidence and relating ideas (Baeten *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, it may not always be clear which aspect of the deep approach is being referred to in the research reported above. Moreover, these reviewed studies are constructed on data from traditional learning situations. Yet, there is a considerable body of the literature reviewing learning environment in the form of information and communication technology (ICT) (based on Fry's book (2009); and Segrave and Holt's review (2003)). Some of these studies concentrated on 'personal learning' environments, self-regulated learning which connects formal and informal learning (Valtonen *et al.*, 2012; Dabbagh and Kitsantas, 2012). Moreover, some research focused on a blended learning style, which combines face-to-face instruction with technology (Richardson and Turner, 2000; Holley and Dobson, 2008; and Gerbic, 2011), while other researchers saw technology as the main instrument for teaching and learning (Ellis *et al.*, 2009). In addition, some researchers consider these technology resources as tools to enhance the student's learning experience. For example, Ellis and Calvo (2006) focused their research on Third Year Engineering students to investigate the quality of student learning experiences in online and face-to-face discussions. The sample size was 115 students and they recruited to respond to three questionnaires: approaches to learning through discussion, conceptions for learning through discussions, and perception of learning through discussions. However, this study revealed two group of students: one group who experienced discussions as a method of supporting reproduction (associated with surface approaches to learning) and the other group who experienced discussions as a technique of understanding the subject being studied (associated with deep approaches to learning). Additionally, Hall's study (2003) implemented their research at more than one institution. With over 1,500 students and 75 academic staff, this study examined the impact of the web on the nature of learning communities and how the web would promote learners' engagement as part of learning communities. Findings reported were that setting ground-rules at the beginning of courses was vital, as students can become partners in shaping their expectations, which need to be connected with institutional values.

On the other hand, another group of researchers have emphasized that the technology development has been used to support student learning. These studies discussed how resources could be flexible to support students. Boyle *et al.* (2005) proposed a virtual

learning environment (VLE), to solve the issues of first year withdrawal. It aimed to engage students and to ease the subject for students understanding. It concluded with students' satisfaction and increased the passing level over two years. Moreover, an investigation conducted by Crook and Barrowcliff (2001) aimed to assess computer facilities and usefulness. The investigation was implemented on the network computing in students' bedrooms on campus at a UK university with a random sample of 34 students from the second and third year. They found that using computers can empower research and study but can also challenge students to prioritize academic tasks and to focus on their learning.

Reviewing the studies above, which are related to the learning environment from a pedagogical perspective, has revealed a common approach that been used to find results; as students were the core of these studies as well as in designing and researching learning environments. In general, quantitative surveys were conducted with students to test variables, which are part of the learning environment. However, in some cases this was combined with individual or group interviews and classroom observations.

2.4.1.2 Organisational settings as learning environment:

Lippman (2010) stated that motivating students through the place where they learn would affect their learning environment. However, the environment surrounds learning and teaching, and includes: campus climate, advising programs that support students' learning and teaching processes, and administrative structure and behaviour (Del Favero, 2002; and Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). In addition, it involves providing student services, such as housing, health, sport facilities and food; the organisation's ability to strength the academic skills, such as writing, critical thinking and research skills; and the organisation's science capacities, such as specialised teachers, laboratories and library resources (Huang and Fisher, 2011).

In addition, some articles focused on providing students with updated and suitable ICT and learning technologies, which would affect their learning experiences (Fry, 2009; and Stensaker *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, other studies concentrated on how the physical facilities and their designs would affect the students and their learning

processes; as Sanoff (2011) argued that the architecture designers, as well as the teachers, students and administrators, all together, can create the space and the experience to affect learning. Likewise, Radcliffe *et al.* (2008) identify a link between pedagogy, technology and the design of the learning space. Nevertheless, Tanner (2008) debated that organisations should be considered holistically, not only the classrooms in which teaching takes place. He argued that both the formal and informal meeting spaces should be considered as they are essential contributors to learning. Therefore, Tanner invites us to consider a campus wide experience, not only the interior of the classroom, when studying learning environments.

Kvan (2013) found that usual factors such as light, temperature, ergonomic comfort, noise, quality of the construction and proportions of space have a direct impact on learning effectiveness. He added that higher ceilings create a sense of more space, hence less crowding and greater satisfaction in the quality of the space. Moreover, it has been shown that good sight lines across a group encourage better discussion (Wong, Sommer & Cook, 1992). Despite Kvan's review, the correlation between the design of spaces and educational outcomes is not clearly tied. However, a poor learning environment clearly detracts from learning effectiveness (Earthman, 2004). Nevertheless, learning is work, particular when dealing with adult learners (with high motivation and working with complex materials) that requires considerable focus to master it successfully, so the fewer the distractions and discomforts there are, the better the outcomes (Higgins *et al.*, 2005). Higgins *et al.* added, if it has been proven that productivity is affected by worker satisfaction, we should not be surprised that the studies indicate that the environment affects learning. In addition to physical facilities, the research also highlighted the context of organisational responsibilities, as it has been shown that student partnership in decision-making bodies by creating facilities and spaces for electing their representatives is just as essential (Altbach, 2006).

Moreover, some studies stress the role and the need for higher education institutions to update and advance their facilities and learning resources (Shapiro and Levine, 1999); and training, to develop skills and enhance the knowledge of their own academic and administrative staff members, with regard to teaching and providing all round support to students (Dixon and Scott, 2003; & Gillespie and Robertson, 2010).

The studies reviewed above illustrated a common method of approach that been implemented in their research process: quantitative surveys were conducted with students to test variables, which are part of the learning environments, combined with individual or group interviews and facilities observation.

2.4.1.3 Networking as a learning environment:

The environment, here, includes: virtual, open and public accessible resources; as learning in this environment can take place in different contexts and it is the network configuration which defines the specific learning environment (Viciene, 2002; and Kim, 2011); as even beyond the constructed places, virtual places (such as social actions) can define the learning environment.

From this viewpoint, some authors defined a good learning environment as the environment which provides learners with chances to establish and develop networks, both locally (inside their university) and internationally, that are related to their study interests (Teichler, 2009). Therefore, higher education institutions should be involved in joint, exchanged and international study programs as well as international conferences, online networking resources and workshops (Guruz, 2008; Robertson, 2005; Kehm and Teichler, 2006). In addition, they recommend that the higher education institutions include study trips, courses and field studies abroad as part of their programs. Moreover, other studies found that a good learning environment must also comprise an active social and cultural life, or so called 'Personal Learning Networks (PLN)'; so that students can build new social networks, make new friends and learn about new cultures (Krause, 2006). Hence, developing connections and social networks are found to have a positive influence on a student's learning experience (Trowler, 2010).

Nevertheless, Abualrub *et al.* (2013) recommended that higher education institutions should help to create a learning environment that provides students with the technologies and the opportunities to create and join networks that meet their cultural, social and study interests. However, other researchers named this situation as '**collaborative learning**' where interactions among peers constitute the most

important factor for learning, without excluding other factors such as interactions with teachers and learning materials (Dillenbourg, Jarvela and Fischer, 2009). In collaborative learning students are actively engaged in the process of learning by discussing with peers, exchanging viewpoints and providing feedback (Smith and MacGregor, 1992). In this context, computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) has grown increasingly (Dillenbourg, Jarvela and Fischer, 2009; and Li *et al.*, 2008), especially with the Web 2.0 (Conole and Alevizou, 2010). Thus, social media tools (for example, blogs, wikis, media sharing tools and social bookmarking systems) can be used to promote collaboration between learners (Ford, Bowden and Beard, 2011), as these technologies can help to create online social networks, based on common interests and formal or informal learning contexts (Bisgin *et al.*, 2012; LaRue, 2012; and Musial and Kazienko, 2012). Therefore, many studies have been published which focus on collaborative learning resources and how they related to students learning efficiently (Hain and Back, 2008), as many of the more recent students have a social motivation for learning, such as finding information to impress their peers and offering help in a group task, (Vassileva, 2008). However, most of these experiments involve a single social media tool, such as Blogger, MediaWiki, Twitter, Delicious, and YouTube (Homola and Kubincova, 2009; Popescu, 2010; and Popescu, 2012).

Additionally, Popescu (2012) proposed eMUSE (**e**mpowering **M**ashUps for **S**ocial **E**-learning) platform and examined it on a course (Web Applications' Design) that was taught to 4th year undergraduate students in Computer Science at the University of Craiova. The eMUSE platform offered: integrated access to all the Web 2.0 tools selected by the instructor of the course, retrieved students' actions with each tool, provided a summary of each student's activity, and basic administrative services; arguing that with students too much freedom to use social media for learning and lack of structure can create confusion, which delays the learning process. He concluded his experiment with positive feedback received from the students. Limitations can be identified from this study as it was only used on one course. It might give different results on other pedagogical approaches, and it needs to be systematically assessed to measure its affectedness on learning outcomes.

Similar studies were conducted on other platforms that use several social media tools such as; iGoogle (personalized dashboard including user-defined social media modules) (Hemmi *et al.*, 2009), some learning management systems (LMS) which integrate social media tools (Beemer and Gregg, 2009), and recently the “**mash-up personal learning environments**” platforms appeared which support learners in building their own PLE (Wild, 2009).

Overall, most of the reviewed studies above were quantitative and experimental, based on one course or one class and often combined with student interview and some platform observations. However, these studies need to be systematically evaluated to test their influences on learning outcomes.

2.4.2 Curriculum and resources

There is a significant body of European and US literature examining student learning experience through studies of curriculum and approaches to teaching, including Bligh’s book of lectures and discussion (Bligh, 2000) and the reviews of the European and American studies by Dochy and his co-authors (Dochy *et al.*, 2003). However, strategies for endorsing learning can be identified under this literature theme.

Many studies have conceptualized learning through a number of teaching strategies. There are some studies, which focused on joint group work by studying the effect of this teaching strategy rather than focusing on the knowledge outcomes. These studies included; engaging actively rather than passively in learning and promoting student responsibility for learning (Clarke and Lane, 2005); and promoting a sense of engagement and emotional belonging (Cartney and Rouse, 2008). Limitation to these studies can be reported, as they did not focus on how groups can be structured to enhance learning, instead, they tended to evaluate modules under specific subject areas.

Learning from and with peers is being recognised as an opportunity for mutual learning between pairs of students, though it is common in medical education already (Ertl and Wright, 2008). For example, the study of Nestel and Kidd (2005) evaluated a workshop for third year students on patient interviewing. The evaluation strategy

involved students self-rating their skills, and an analysis of before and after the test course. However, authors found that students gained awareness of communication issues on the project, but they did not score in their test to show any improvement in their interviewing skills compared with the control group, who did not participate in the project.

Problem-based learning is one of the common learning strategies that have been studied across many subjects, such as medical and health education (Newman, 2003), Geography (Healey, 2005) and the Biological Sciences (Orsmond *et al.*, 2004). These studies evaluated students' satisfaction as benefits from such a strategy, but whether knowledge was gained was not clear.

Learning activities outside the university is another type of learning strategy, such as work-based experience (Smith *et al.*, 2004) or final year placement projects at local institutions (Gifford *et al.*, 2005). These studies evaluated the students' experience of learning outside the university and that revealed students' enjoyment and emotional commitment which is not encouraged elsewhere in the university's curriculum. However, the authors reported that this method of learning might not be suitable for all students.

Many articles compared the impact of various approaches to learning on the students' experience and their effectiveness. For example, Sharpe and Benfield's (2005) review of research on blended learning, suggests that improved student satisfaction results in an increased retention level. However, they identify the key of retention as interaction and communication between students and staff.

Generally, over the research reviewed in this theme many limitations can be identified: most of these studies are based on one institution, and it is not clear how learning environments and approaches to teaching impact on student learning experience.

2.4.3 Induction and transition

There has been increasing concern about withdrawal and retention during the transition phase from high school (Secondary School) to Higher Education in the UK (Ertl and Wright, 2008). In addition, many higher education institutions have tried to enhance their induction process to maximize student attachment to their universities, based on the evidence from the literature that most students who withdraw do so in their first year (Harvey *et al.*, 2006).

The research reported under this subject can be divided into three focuses:

- An emphasis on student expectations and preparedness for higher education study.
- A focus on the process of induction as preparation for higher education.
- Highlighting the competences and understanding requirements at university.

2.4.3.1 Student preparedness for and expectations of higher education study

This type of research generally ran by distributing questionnaires early on in the first year of undergraduate students and asking them about their preparedness for higher education study; as Lowe and Cook's (2003) study. Although the study conducted was as a pilot study in one of the UK's university, their two waves of questionnaire survey about students' expectation about academic skills in pre-entry and at the end of the first term in university revealed that many students arrive at higher education with little expectation about the academic amount of work required. Byrne and Flood (2005) conducted a related study and they reached the same conclusion. Similarly, Birks and his colleagues (Birks *et al.*, 2013) conducted a study in Australia that exposed the same results, using a qualitative questionnaire with open-ended questions. However, the sample size was small.

On the other hand, Pampaka, Williams and Hutcheson (2012) identified students' perceptions of the transition experience through case study with mixed methods (longitudinal surveys with three waves of questionnaires, fieldwork observation, and interviewing staff and students). Nevertheless, the authors claimed that this was the first time that constructing and validating the measures of students' perception of their transitions into university study had been done. They concluded their study by stating that students who experienced the transition are in general happy about this

experience, they expected to be more grown up about their learning and they enjoyed it greatly. In addition, many students generally had negative attitude regarding asking questions and discussing issues at university. However, several limitations can be identified from this study: the sample frame of this study was not revealed as the authors only stated the number of universities studied in this research and this was only five UK universities and they only wrote the sample size; hence, readers cannot predict the size of this study – i.e. whether it is small or large scale. Moreover, the second stage of questionnaires had considerably fewer respondents compared to the first stage, as the sample size had dropped from 1,778 to 875 students. Although the authors acknowledged this and stated that this issue would not affect the main stratified variable of subject area, the final conclusion might nevertheless not be the same, if the respondents were the same. In addition, the aim of the first stage of the questionnaires was to record student perception about university study before entering the university and this stage targeted accepted students during their summer vacation, but then this stage had stretched to cover the students on their first week of university. However, this study needs to measure specific student learning outcomes.

These studies highlight the need for staff and tutors to have a keen awareness of the attitudes, qualities and skills that students bring with them to university.

2.4.3.2 Preparation for higher education using the process of induction

Articles under this subject highlighted the need to engage students actively to develop their study skills in higher education. Thus, some researchers investigated this issue by suggesting induction programmes to students who enrolled in one course at one university as Edward and his colleagues reported (Edward and Middleton, 2002 and Edward 2003) They investigated students withdrawal rates at one university from an Engineering course. They suggested a one-week (activity-based) induction for students which resulted in student satisfaction and enjoyment. However, this programme was not evaluated systematically, as the authors did not report whether it affected the withdrawal rate or not, and they did not explain whether students gained any study skills or improvement in their preparedness. A similar study was conducted on an activity-based induction process by Gaskin and Hall (2002), and it was descriptive in a local scale initiative (one university in the UK). However, Mayhew,

Vanderlinden and Kim (2010) conducted large-scale research at thirty-five American universities to investigate the influence of orientation programs on student academic learning, using questionnaires with closed and open-ended questions. Their research suggested that having a dedicated office for orientation programs significantly closed the gap between transfer and first year students and that will impact on academic learning both in the first year and transfer year by explaining how to access critical campus resources. Yet, the proposed orientation office requires follow up research to evaluate it and to ascertain how it affects withdrawal rates, and to ascertain exactly how it can meet student expectation.

Another related study, discussed by May *et al.* (2005), tried to tackle the withdrawal issue through an orientation pre-entry weekend to develop students' study skills. Although the authors reported that this project had a major influence on student retention, this proposed programme was, however, poorly evaluated in terms of following students as they settled into university. Related to this study is Knox (2005) research, which described a presented curriculum to help students in their transition from Further Education to Higher Education. In this small-scale and local study (in the UK), the author suggested that this programme had affected students positively in their performance, progression and retention.

Overall a limitation of these studies may be identified, as the systematic evaluation was missing: follow-up outcomes such as the level of withdrawal from Higher Education or maximizing settling in for students, or evaluating goals, for example, skill achievement, was lacking. In addition, most of these studies tended to be local and descriptive.

2.4.3.3 Skills, experiences and understanding what required at university

Much research has studied efforts to identify the skills required at undergraduate first year level and those developed at A-level, such as Newman and Noss (2001) and Cox (2000). These descriptive and small-scale studies have explained how a transition module that been given to Engineering and Mathematics students has smoothed their transition to university. This module includes learning competencies tests, which are used to improve a measure of preparedness and then to influence teaching, assessment

and learning strategies. However, Booth (2001) explored the preparedness of History students for the transition from school to university, while Smith (2004) concentrated on students of English. Both studies are exploratory, descriptive, and tend to be small scale. Nevertheless, they highlighted the importance of closing the gap in transition from school to university, and clearly described the differences in skills required for learning at university.

To sum up this theme, these studies reviewed here were mainly descriptive and generally conducted upon one class or course, except those from the USA. There is a gap in the studies with more evaluation of the learning outcomes required. In general, from this research, it is evident that there are major interests regarding student attrition, especially for undergraduate students, which led to consideration of the effect of the transition from school to Higher Education.

2.4.4 Student perception of learning

Research on the student perception of learning cover many topics and themes, and most of them are descriptive using surveys and interview methods.

However, one of the categories that been researched under this theme is the perception of learning by a particular group of students: these studies explore the learning experience of particular groups of students who face specific challenges or who have historically been disadvantaged, for example, students with a disability (Fuller *et al.*, 2004); students in a newly opened university (O'Connor, 2003), mature students (Bamber and Tett, 2000); and research into female students (Smith, 2004; Lawrence, Ashford and Dent, 2006; & Leathwood, 2006). The subject of research into female students will be discussed in detail next, dominating a sub-heading solely as this is the most relevant topic for this PhD study.

The study related to students with disability (Fuller *et al.*, 2004) has pointed out the need to arrange equity as much as quality, and the important of accessing the information. Moreover, this study noted the different support levels received by the students within a single university in the UK. Although this paper focused on the

factors that impact on the ability to learn more than on the actual learning process, this study managed to impact on higher education policy institutions to make them meet disability regulations to provide support for learning.

Nevertheless, another study covered student learning perception in general, such as O'Connor's investigation into the conditions affecting learning in two new universities in the UK. By using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, he drew on the different conditions required to facilitate university learning.

In addition, a research focus has been given to the learning experience for mature students. As Bamber and Tett (2000) suggested, students can minimize the alien learning environment by changing themselves through their own transformation. They suggested as well that institutions should be changed to meet the needs of these students.

These studies related to a specific group are mostly case studies, based on a single institution, and using surveys.

A second category of studies related to student learning experience focused on student learning in a particular subject, such as students undertaking Sport Studies (Lane *et al.*, 2004), Education Studies (Davies and Hogarth, 2004), Medical School (Miller, 1993), Geography Department (Dalton, 2001), Law Studies (Baderin, 2005) and Fashion Design (Drew *et al.*, 2000). This body of research identified some issues faced by students and teachers within these fields. However, other researchers explored student experience of learning, including Business Studies students' attitude towards the use of the Internet for learning. (Selwyn *et al.*, 2000).

The final descriptive research comprises a group of articles focusing on learning by stages related to the student's learning experience development. Hence, certain studies have investigated how students themselves perceive their skills development or lack of whilst studying at one particular level (Burke *et al.*, 2005). Moreover, some explore the learning experience of the first year (McCune, 2004), as explained in the second theme of this literature. Similarly, a study has investigated the learning

experience of the final year and assesses how writing a dissertation would affect that learning (Todd *et al.*, 2004).

2.4.4.1 research into female students

It has been noted that research related to women as students covers very different topics, for instance, sexual assault on university campuses (D. Labhardt *et al.*, 2017; McCaughey and Cermele, 2017; Amar *et al.*, 2014; Banyard & Moynihan, 2011; Katz, Olin, Herman, & DuBois, 2013; McMahan, 2010; and Shotland & Stebbins, 1980), bullying and victimization in colleges and universities (Lund and Ross, 2016; Matsunaga, 2010; Walker, Sockman, & Koehn, 2011; and Wensley & Campbell, 2012)), as well as tobacco consumption and smoking among students at universities (Guerra, Costa *et al.*, 2017). Still, none of the above topics were related to learning in Higher Education, as they were rather sampling female students to test teenagers' behaviour and to compare the results with men's behaviour.

Moreover, it has been found that the current tendency of studies related to women are discussing the excessive use of social media and time consumption on social network site access among young females compared to male usage (such as Jaafar and Ruzyani's meta-analysis (2017) and Huang and Chiungjung's study (2017)). Yet, they were not discussing this networking behaviour in terms of learning at university.

However, only a limited number of studies have been found related to the female undergraduate learning experience, and which cover research about student perceptions. Smith (2004) has studied women's higher grades and achievements which were at a higher level compared to male achievements. For the majority of women taking part in the study, getting good grades was the most important part of university life, and their social life only happened once studying was finished. However, despite the small sample number and the fact that this study was only conducted over one University Department (Department of Geography and Earth Science), the questionnaire and interview questions were not clear in terms of design and type of questions posed.

Another research topic focused on independent learner discourses about the gender nature and their perceptions (Leathwood, 2006), revealing that the independent

learners are gender and culturally specific. Although, feminine identity of the 'helpless female' did not seriously conflict with aspects of girls' own identity construction, it still created significant levels of anxiety and this could be an indicator of the extreme level of struggle girls face and, indeed, are willing to face (at times) in respect of the contradictions between messages of independence and the requirement of compliance to notions of traditional femininity. On the other hand, male students can refuse to ask for help, if it is challenging traditional frameworks for masculinity. However, the results of this longitudinal study should be tested across a number of higher education institutions to assure the generalization is possible.

Conversely, the third type of research focused on the different coping strategies between genders under stress and their reflections on this issue (Lawrence, Ashford and Dent 2006), which stated that male students have a tendency to avoid using emotion-focused approaches, in contrast to female students who predominantly use this approach. Despite its clear survey methodology and statistical analysis, this study may encompass drawbacks because of its small sample size (58 female and 102 male students), focused towards a single discipline (Sport Sciences undergraduate students) from only one university. Such a study needs to recruit participants across various degree courses from a number of universities to achieve a more equal gender distribution, and to find out what effects, if any, the discipline has upon the strategies employed, and finally, future studies could attempt to ascertain whether there are developments or changes in these coping strategies over the period of study, and also whether age impacts on the strategies adopted.

Generally, these studies, related to the female learning experience, have linked and compared females' results (whether in identities, attitude or strategies) to male motivation. They lack deeper investigation into how females feel and what they need to do, to improve their experience in learning and study in general. They also omitted discussion on background and ethnicity, which could affect the behavior and decisions which these women had to take and implement.

However, there are other different types of studies which placed women at the very core of their research, focusing on their networking in society, under the theory of social capital. This called for more investigation to establish a link between the theory

of social capital and female learning. Social capital means a structural resource that is retrieved by individuals through their social networks to achieve and secure required benefits (Portes, 1998 and Lin, 2001). Yet, numerous writers acknowledged the work of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1998) and Putnam (1995, 2000) that made social capital so popular among researchers (Alfred, 2009). Although, the work of each author presented its own view of social capital theory, they did, nevertheless, share five major components of this theory: networks, resources, norms, shared values and trust. In addition, the core hypothesis guiding social capital studies is the good will of others toward us; as Adler and Kwon (2002) mentioned this as the feature guiding social capital, and they defined it as: the sympathy, trust and forgiveness that friends and acquaintances offer to each other.

Conversely, Anucha and colleagues (2006) found in their study that in a community of minority women they have good bonding relations with members of their cultural communities, but they often have weak bridging links to attach them beyond their ethno-cultural community. This result challenged the claim given (that Putnam found in 2000) that social capital benefits communities and households regardless of gender.

More importantly, in a study of social capital among women learners in Australia (Balatti and Falk, 2001) found that for all the sites, the learning program became rich ground for social capital to develop. This result proves that if faculty expose students to related professional organizations (through conferences or professional meetings), it can give them the possibility to bond with other professionals outside their immediate circle, creating relationship benefits in terms of learning opportunities.

In conclusion, it can be noted that under this theme, student perception of learning, that some papers have triangulated their methodologies to meet different research objectives or as part of the evaluation process (Smith, 2005). However, the majority of these reviewed studies have used triangulation to confirm their results (Bryman, 2012).

2.4.5 Cultural influences

There are a significantly increasing number of international students who study in a different educational and value system: such as studying in the US or UK (Sulkowski, and Deakin, 2009). Therefore, many studies on this theme attempt to: understand the international student's behaviour through their cultural conceptualizations, discover the challenges they are facing at university and study how the cultural background may affect student's approaches to learning in higher education. However, Crossley and Watson (2004) argued that the main driving force behind such research is financial objectives, as it may bring additional revenues to these institutions. However, most of the research related to this theme was based on survey questionnaires which had been applied to one institution or one class, to make comparisons between local students (such as English students) and international students (Chinese, for example).

One group of such studies focuses on the students' attitudes to learning, as, for example, Hau and Salili (1996) found that in East Asian societies the concept of success includes many stakeholders, such as peers, family and local society. Therefore, a student's success is a matter of **saving family face** (Ho, 1993). However, Watkins and Biggs (1996) made comparisons between Chinese and English students at UK universities to discover the motivation for learning for each group. They found that a mix of family face, personal ambition, peer support, interest and material reward motivated students, who were Eastern culturally orientated whilst the motivation for students, who were Western culturally orientated was a job, a degree, or a high salary, as the purpose of study here is a means to an end. In a similar study conducted by Deakin and Sulkowski (2007), where they surveyed 69 students at the University of Gloucestershire and a German partner institution, their survey was based on Hofstede's (1994) cultural dimensions. However, they found that students with highly power distant backgrounds (where power is distributed unequally in their society) perceived that their family would influence their career.

Another body of research concentrates on students' interaction with tutors and learning styles. As Deakin and Sulkowski (2007) found that the same group of students (from cultures that score high in power distance) tended to respect lecturers

and feared them, to the extent that they agree unquestioningly with them, and would not discuss views they disagreed with, or ask for help. Moreover, they prefer a didactic type of teaching and tend to avoid presenting their opinions openly (Newell, 1999; Chan, 1999). However, students from a less power distant culture tend to interact equally with their lecturers, and they prefer the self-learning approach. For example, Asian and Germans students felt happy working with others, whilst British students tend to work alone (Deakin and Sulkowski, 2007). In addition, students from a less power distant culture prefer active learning more than the didactic approach and are more comfortable to engage in discussions in the classroom (Butcher and McGrath, 2004).

Regarding learning styles, however a research project conducted by Watkins (2000) confirmed the differences between Western systems of education and the education systems of other cultures; as in Western education it tends to be more controlled internally, and self-esteem and academic achievement are related to deep learning approaches, while other cultures tended to achieve a lower level of cognitive learning by relying on repetition and memorization techniques. However, Biggs (1996) called this type of learning '**Chinese Paradox**', as he claimed that most Chinese students are rote learning, as they memorize their subjects without understanding the content and, thus, their academic performance is poor. However, this attempt to relate cultural sides/styles with learning styles runs the danger of generalization and stereotyping (Sulkowski and Deakin, 2009). Yet, Dahlin and Watkins (2000) highlighted the role of repetition in constructing understanding, which showed in Chinese schools, as it can principally serve to memorize but can then subsequently help to develop deep understanding.

Overall in this theme it is evident how culture influences the student learning experience. Most of these research topics are based on questionnaires which were implemented on a class level and within one institution. However, the effect of labeling a group of students, or generalizing the connection between cultural areas and learning styles, might be subjective and based on personal reflection so more systematic evaluation and longitudinal studies are required: as learning styles and preferences could be changed or affected by personal development (Honey and Mumford, 1992). In addition, students might interact with other cultures before

entering Higher Education through the globalization effect, internships, international travel, direct or indirect media effects, or through studying abroad, which could affect students unconsciously or cautiously with regard to cultural influences and behavior (Sulkowski, and Deakin, 2009). This suggests that both the institutions and tutors need to recognize the cultural diversity of students, which may challenge some students to accomplish deeper and successful learning.

2.4.6 Assessment and feedback

Many studies in the literature related to feedback and assessment have agreed that student learning is based on the identity of these assessments and students would define their curriculum centered on the messages sent by the assessment system (Rust, O'Donovan, and Price, 2005). Hence, several researchers have concentrated on feedback and assessment and how they affect the student learning experience. However, this research subjectively varies, as some of them have examined the impact of different forms of assessment on student learning, while others have explored students' perception experiences of assessments and feedback.

Many forms of assessments have been covered in the literature, such as:

– The form of multiple choice: this strategy is regularly associated with summative assessment which is intended to assist the level of student learning at the end of the module, where the students' approach to learning is on surface (Gibbs *et al.*, 1997). However, Fellenz (2004) used multiple choice assignments in his module as formative assessment, which was proposed to evaluate student learning. He reported that with proper support, students engaged with the subject learning matter in deeper approaches.

– Constant assessment through tutorials: Trotter (2006) used summative assessment in the form of tutorial files which contributed towards the students' final grades for the module. He found that while some students enjoyed the challenge of submitting work regularly, others found it exhausting. However, MacMillan and McLean (2005) used three tutorial sessions for module assessment that required students to read a briefing paper before each tutorial and submit an evaluation report afterwards. Students interviewed by MacMillan and McLean stated that they studied in depth and detail compared to the examinations, and interviewed tutors noticed improvements in

written submission skills, especially in discussion topics. Both studies (Trotter, 2006 and MacMillan & McLean, 2005) did not measure the learning outcomes from applying this strategy of assessment, except for noting the writing improvements. In both studies it can be argued that this strategy of assessment can overload the tutors with a very heavy work to provide students with regular feedback.

– Self and peer assessment: studies related to peer assessment showed common results as students did not at first feel confident enough to critique or judge the work of their companions, but with clear guidance, and with the provision of frameworks for assessment criteria, students can develop the ability of critical thinking and enhance their active learning (Dochy *et al.*, 1999). However, Langan *et al.* (2005) raised uncertainties about the validity of peer assessment, as they found that the grades of students who peer assessed were .05 higher compared to those given by tutors. Self-assessment strategy, however, has been discussed by Fitzpatrick (2006). She noticed resistance from students initially, but later they reported development of their critical thinking skills and took more responsibility for their own learning outcomes.

Another area of research related to assessments is students' experiences and expectations, as many researchers found that students only focus in their learning on what is assessed, therefore studies have suggested that changing the assessment regime might change how and what students learn (Fellenz, 2004 and MacMillan & McLean, 2005). Moreover, areas of these studies focus on how students use and perceive feedback given for formative reasons, such as MacDonald (2004), Orsmond *et al.* (2005) and Pitts (2005). These studies found that students want the feedback to be: clear, on time, positive even on critical notes, personalised and containing detailed comments, and also that when students are at their first level of a course they need more guidance in their written work. However, Pitts (2005) identified barriers to meeting these students' expectations in her case study: as tutors, for example, in the Music Department usually put their feedback on the students' files rather than passing feedback back to them directly. Hence, tutors stated that feedback is less related to student learning and that it is more related to the body of bureaucratic procedures that they need to undertake. Therefore, on the students' part, she found dissatisfaction. Another obstacle found in Weaver's (2006) study, was that when feedback was

received when all of the coursework assessments were completed, students were not able to act on the feedback or had limited opportunities to do so.

Overall, the theme of feedback and assessment in relation to the student learning experience frequently related to one institution, one course, and was often conducted by module leaders or tutors. Moreover, descriptive and small-scale studies were the main body of research and experimental studies could not be found.

The common findings are that assessments and feedback enhance the student learning experience and that the obstacles described above can prevent that.

2.4.7 Student learning experience as a tool of measuring the quality in higher education

Discussions and studies related to quality matters in Higher Education have gained attention internationally since the 1970s (Marsh, 1984). However, current researchers debated that in order to assess quality in higher education, student learning and experience must be taken into account, however, student learning is difficult to determine (Pring, 1992). Therefore, many efforts have been made to assess quality in higher education based on evaluations delivered by the students themselves (Ertl *et al.*, 2008). However, many researchers have justified the use of student evaluation; as students are the core recipients of the higher education experience, they spent significant time and energy attending universities, and they have been in contact with their tutors for a considerable length of time. Therefore, several authors stressed the importance of the use of student evaluation (March and Overal, 1980). Conversely, student evaluation associated with quality in Higher Education has appeared in the US system to assure quality during the 1980s (Murray *et al.*, 1990).

Several institutions have managed and created surveys for graduated and present day students to evaluate institution quality and the quality of student experience, as well as the impact of university on student learning:

– College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) by Pace (1987): this questionnaire has been developed based on the concept that the more students are

involved in educational engagements, the more advantage they experience in their development and learning.

– Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) by Ramsden (1991): this instrument has been developed to evaluate teaching effectiveness at the end of the degree or course. Nevertheless, Wilson *et al.* (1997) stated that CEQ is the most common tool that been used in British research.

– The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE): the survey established in 1999 in the US (NSSE, 2014) aimed to assess the participation of undergraduate students in programs and activities which higher education institutions provide and used the results as a measurement of quality and to identify good practice (Kuh, 2002).

– The National Student Survey (NSS): took place in the UK in 2005 and aimed to measure the students' opinions of the quality of their degree programmes and was set up to inform the public and any future students about selecting the right higher education institution (HEFCE, 2013). However, Prosser (2005) suggested that such a survey should not be used to make comparisons between institutions.

However, not all academics agree on using student learning experience to evaluate the quality of an institution; as Richardson (2005) stated that student evaluation could be affected by the popularity of a teacher instead of their effectiveness. Moreover, SurrIDGE (2006) argued that NSS figures can produce misleading measures of teaching as it should take into account students' characteristics, institutions and the courses which they study.

Overall, in this theme of learning experience it can be concluded that measuring the quality of institutions or programmes can be implemented from the students' perspective. Generally, most of the studies were examining the validity and reliability of the measuring tools for this field, as most of them are based on quantitative designs.

2.5 Student learning experience in Saudi Arabia

Most of the published papers regarding the learning experience in Saudi Arabia, especially the female learning experience, were reported as descriptive and historical background articles (for example, Hamdan, 2005; Al Munajjed, 2009; Onsmann, 2012; Onsmann, 2011; Alshayea, 2012; Rugh, 2002; Alshami, 1983; Barcelo, 2011; Saleh, 1986; Carnoy, 2011; Tjomsland, 2009; Prokop, 2003 and Al Munajjed, 1997). Only a limited number of publications of empirical research that merely examine Saudi female students' learning experience in association with their learning environment were identified (such as: Hamdan, 2015; Hasan and Gupta, 2013).

On the other hand, studies on the learning experience of male students and/or mixed gender students were quantitatively reported, for instance: Eid and Al-Jabri (2016); Alwagait, *et al.* (2015); and Al-Zahrani (2015). Yet, the definition of the term "learning experience" remains hidden or has been used as an alternative term to "learning performance" which means the effectiveness of learning process (Eid and Al-Jabri, 2016).

A third paradigm of research, with old and a low number of publications, is the exploration of the factors influencing learning that lie within forming students' identities that appropriate to 'community of practice' as the context in which an individual develops the practices (including values, norms, and relationships). Barnawi's (2009) work was the only Saudi paper found to study Saudi students' construction of identity. Yet, his work was purely focused on male students pursuing their postgraduate studies abroad (master's degree in the USA), using a second language. However, his findings suggested that Saudi students experienced difficulties and challenges in negotiating competence, identities, and power relations, which were crucial for participating and being accepted as competent members of their classroom communities (*ibid.*, 2009). In addition, he found that their identity progression and techniques to feel accepted in such community were, firstly, avoiding eye contact with tutors, getting busy by writing notes to avoid participation in class discussion, and rehearsing speaking in English before class time. These could be labelled as self-confidence issues. Then they followed steps to save their "face" and to feel competent with their fellow peers: asking tutors to clarify misunderstood subjects

outside the classroom during tutors' office hours, joining small group of students in the library to engage in discussions, and limiting their public presentations to a lower level, leaving native speakers to continue the presentation. I think that these behaviours to feel welcomed in such a group of classmates translate into the Saudi culture background that includes mature males having to remain correct and never commit errors in their oral communication, hence the common use of the same term in Barnawi's (2009) paper: (*Afraid to lose face*). Male ego can lie behind such results. In addition, I would recommend Barnawi to widen such research to include undergraduate students in his interviews, and to explore such experience locally.

A review of related Saudi literature, with more contemporary references, will follow and be grouped under themes to map the relevant Saudi research studies as the main framework of this PhD research is the Saudi women-learning context.

2.5.1 Learning environments

Most of research within this topic is based on web-mediated learning and information and communication technology (ICT). In addition, the research can be grouped under the theme: pedagogical learning with supportive technologies.

Pedagogical learning with supportive technologies environment:

Studies under this title are mostly about E-learning, and each dealt and studied E-learning from a different viewpoint. Some authors, such Al-Shehri (2010), have published a review regarding this subject. He found that E-learning in Saudi Arabia means using Internet and web technology to transform education, and is mainly about technology, regardless of the educational principles of learning. Consequently, he argued that technology is not what learning is all about. However, Al-Shehri's review was based mainly on the views and interpretations of E-learning of about 30 academics, who work in different Saudi universities. These views, or the data pertaining to it, were collected qualitatively through one-to-one and group discussions during attendance at a two-week workshop course titled "E-learning and the future of digital education" at Manchester University, which the author and the participants attended for a training course. However, limitations to his study can be identified: the author did not record the participants' data and did not write notes during the discussions. However, he wrote what he could remember a while after ending these

discussions, without transcribing what was actually said. Thus, the results might have differed if the author had followed a scientific analysis without running the risk of losing data. Moreover, the participants were not informed about this study until the end of what he called 'informal discussions' which may raise ethical issues; as Bryman (2012) stated that ethical precepts should never be broken except in some rare cases, such as where a covert method is required. The Covert Method is where the researcher's true identity is unknown. However, Bulmer (1982) and Bryman (2012) argued that there are serious ethical and legal issues in the use of covert research, but the use of the covert method might be justified in investigating sensitive subjects. Nevertheless, the covert method violates the principle of informed consent and invades the privacy of those being studied. However, Al-Shehri (2010) concluded results were: (a) the meaning of E-learning varied, and some understood it as a web-based distant education, while others found it to be technology mediated learning, but it is not about the CCTV classes (digital zing classrooms). (b) The software applications of E-learning in Saudi Arabia (such as the learning management system and learning environment management) are founded to be flourishing but they need proper technical support and a suitable hardware infrastructure. (c) There was a limited understanding of E-learners characteristics, motivations, skills, attitudes and perceptions towards E-learning, and consequently this lack of understanding might affect the retention of e-learners in their courses; as these learners used to attend traditional classroom learning programs in their school learning, and shifting from that form of education to stop actually physically going to a learning institution and staying at home using E-learning may affect their acceptance, or they may not have the proper ICT skills to effectively use the E-learning program, which, in turn, could affect their understanding of the tough materials.

In contrast, AlEnezi, AbdulKarim and Veloo (2010) have studied Saudi Arabian students' acceptance and their attitudes towards using E-learning. By using questionnaires, they tested technology acceptance models (TAM's) variables among 408 undergraduate students from five different governmental universities (254 males and 154 females), which resulted in three main variables which significantly influence the students' use of E-learning (these variables are: computer anxiety, computer self-efficacy and enjoyment). However, they did not examine students' perceptions of E-

learning, and their attitude after using such a system; as students may change their behaviour and their perception after experiencing a course or a module.

Another author has studied E-learning as a distance-learning program that uses virtual classrooms in its courses (Al-Nuaim, 2012). Al-Nuaim evaluated E-learning students' performance compared to the face-to-face traditional students enrolled in the same courses and taught by the same instructor: as this course (a fully E-learning program for undergraduates) is the first in Saudi Arabia and has been implemented in King Abdulaziz University. This program allows students to: engage actively through asynchronous technologies (using learning management system, LMS, which has been developed in-house and called EMES "E-Learning Management Electronic System) and communicate with instructors synchronously via virtual classrooms (using audio, video, interactive whiteboard, application sharing, instant polling, text chat, and other features which makes them feel like they are standing face-to-face in a regular classroom. Al-Nuaim used mixed method in her evaluation: first, she compared students' final grades from five different modules for girls (326 female students = 49 online and 277 face-to-face students) and the same five modules for boys (280 male students = 79 online and 201 face-to-face-students); that includes 2 classes for each module; as five classes receive the regular teaching method "face-to-face" and five classes are taught by online virtual classes. These two teaching methods were implemented by the same instructors who taught 10 classes: (five regular classes and five online); and she used *t*-test to compare the students' performance and found: 1- on the female side: there were no significant differences in the performance of online and face-to-face students in three modules: Accounting (ACCT 102), Marketing (BUS 211) and Educational Psychology (PSY 231). However, there were significant differences in the performance in two modules (Public Administration PAD 101 and Political Science PS 101), as face-to-face students performed better and scored higher grades than the online students. 2- on the male side: there were no significant differences in the performance for three modules (Communication Skills COMM 101, Quantitative Analysis ECON 204 and Reading II LANES 215). However, there were significant differences in the performance in two modules, as face-to-face students performed better and scored higher grades than the online students in the Development of Thinking Skills (IS 101), while online students' performance was better than the face-to-face students in Islamic Culture IV (ISLS

401). Secondly, questionnaires were distributed to the same students (49 online female students; and 79 online male students) and instructors (total number is unknown) after the final exams to record their feedback on the E-learning system, interaction methods and the student's overall experience. The results were (unknown response number) that technical problems were the biggest issue facing the students learning experience; as deadlines were missed due to the submission's confirmation students received from the system while, in fact, the deadlines had not been missed in reality. In addition, the questionnaires revealed that online students were heavily reliant on the virtual-classroom lectures and the textbook as study materials rather than the actual content of the LMS. Finally, Al-Nuaim used a qualitative method to report the instructors' experiences. She implemented a focus group session (number of participants is unknown), which revealed that the instructors were amazed by the level of enthusiasm and engagement of students who enrolled for the online course environment compared to face-to-face students, particularly in afternoon classes, as at this time of the day face-to-face students were less active and physically exhausted from a full-day timetable, whereas online students attend these classes from the comfort of their home or office. Limitations can be identified from this study: online female students were not been able to see their female instructor, and on the contrary, female instructors could not see their online female classes due to cultural issues, in comparison with face-to-face classes, where female students and their instructors were able to see each other and communicate directly. Therefore, this issue might affect the online students' performance. In addition, the sample size for online students was very small and this could have affected the results as, for example, in the Module PSY 231 there were only 2 online female students compared to 66 face-to-face female students; and in the module ISLS 401 there were only 4 online male students compared to 108 face-to-face male students. Moreover, the modules' names were missing and only codes were written, therefore it required extra effort to search for the meaning for each code from the KAU website to build an understanding for the students' performance on each module. Furthermore, this study did not clarify the analysis method which had been applied in the questionnaires and the focus group. Sample size, questions and total responses for these two methods were also missing. It might therefore be difficult to replicate this study.

An additional study of E-learning can be added to this theme; where Benselama, Henneche and Ben Saleh (2009) have examined students' opinions regarding the virtual laboratory which has been designed and introduced to the Electrical Engineering Course. 3,200 students took this virtual laboratory module (Computer 101), which was a fully web-based course and in the form of distance learning, run from Riyadh College of Technology. This course required students to have an account in the blackboard, which is a learning management system, and it does not entail a specific time or place to attend. Student feedback was as follows: exam level does not match the level of some students and that could be related to non-existence of an interaction between the students and their trainer: as that was one of the challenges raised by students. Moreover, students have faced a language barrier, as this learning method was in English and the students' knowledge and module background was in Arabic. Finally, the general feedback for students was positive about using the virtual laboratory. However, in this study the method of collecting student feedback was missing, the total number of respondents was missing and also the analysis process was not specified. Therefore, it might be difficult to replicate this study; and it needs a systematic technique to measure the implication of this learning method on the student learning experience and their acquisition of knowledge. However, student feedback should be used to influence further development of this virtual laboratory.

Furthermore, Alebaikan and Troudi (2010) examine the quality of online discussion in blended learning courses at Saudi Arabian universities. This pilot study took place at the King Saud University in Riyadh to assess the blended learning course run by the College of Applied Studies and Community Services (CASCS). The CASCS is implementing 'Jusur', which is a learning management system (LMS), to offer online learning resources alongside face-to-face lectures, and this was only offered to female students. However, Alebaikan and Troudi used a qualitative approach in this study; and the data collection methods were: observation of online discussions, two student focus groups, one instructor focus group, nine individual in-depth interviews with students, and two in-depth interviews with e-learning supervisors. The sample size was 9 female undergraduate students and 3 female instructors, all from the College of Applied Studies and Community Services (CASCS). Moreover, the thematic analysis approach was conducted to analyze the data. Therefore, 4 themes emerged relating to the quality of online discussion: (1) E-pedagogy: the instructors were lacking in

pedagogical and technical skills, as well as experience; and tutor feedback received was below student expectation. (2) Infrastructure and LMS tools: limited LMS tools for instructors to use, students experienced technical problems, and there was no internet access for students and tutors on campus, therefore they have to work from home. (3) E-Plagiarism: there was 'cut and paste' in online discussion assignments and there is no anti-plagiarism software currently supported in the Arabic language. Students claimed that they do not have adequate academic writing skills and the instructors do not read their submissions anyway. (4) Demand on time: with the large number of students per class, instructors need more time to monitor students' posts, evaluate their work, give feedback and reply to their queries in general. However, results might differ if this study was to be conducted in more than one university or over more courses. Nevertheless, it might produce a better understanding if this research examined the effectiveness of learning in online discussions on the student learning process and learning outcomes. Moreover, it would be recommended that the same online discussion is re-evaluated after updating in accordance with student and instructor feedback. Furthermore, using online discussion to support student learning, rather than an assessment method, as well as laying down clear criteria for assessments, might decrease the level of plagiarism which is currently an issue.

Similarly, Zouhair (2010) piloted student satisfaction with using the learning management systems (LMS) called 'JUSUR'. Having surveyed 23 female students at Prince Sultan University in Riyadh, a descriptive analysis was used to analyze the questionnaires' close-ended questions and its one open-ended question. Hence, it gave the result that students found JUSUR to be helpful, enhancing their understanding of the course context, were satisfied and gave positive feedback. In addition, from the instructors' perspective, JUSUR was simple to use and has different features which make it simpler for students to focus on the learning tasks. However, this study showed that JUSUR does not have some learning resources such as e-books and e-journals or a research article database. Although the sample size of this study was small, it did nevertheless indicate that students were engaged with this learning experience.

Yet, Al-Fahad (2009) measured the students' attitudes and perceptions about the effectiveness of using mobile devices in their learning environments. At King Saud

University, in Riyadh, a random sample of undergraduate female students (186) filled in a questionnaire. However, the data collected was analyzed statistically through SPSS. This study concluded by pointing to the fact that mobile learning is accepted widely by the student community. And the majority of students stated that wireless networks increase the flexibility of accessing the learning resources. In addition, the results revealed that mobile learning activities can better engage students in the learning process. Yet, for better understanding a qualitative study could be also conducted to reveal students' issues about using such a technology in their learning and how this might affect their learning outcomes.

On the other hand, some researchers studied the learning environment itself in relation to students' learning experience. Eid and Al-Jabri (2016), for instance, empirically examined the effectiveness of social networking sites (a type of student learning environment) on students' learning experience. They adopted a cross-sectional survey questionnaire for data collection (308 valid responses, including graduates and undergraduate male students) at one public Saudi university. They found a positive relationship between the use of social networking sites (in terms of online chatting, file sharing and knowledge sharing) and entertainment and enjoyment with students' learning performances. However, their results would be more powerful if they asked the students about their own tools they use for social networking, instead of listing the eight social networking sites named Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Dropbox, Instagram, LinkedIn, and wikis, and asked the students to rate which tool they mostly used. In addition, the authors could strengthen their survey questions by justifying clearly the process of selecting these eight tools, without leaving readers with only "popular SNS tools".

Similarly, Alwagait and his colleagues (2015) studied the effectiveness of social media on students' learning performances. Using survey questionnaires for data collection (108 valid responses) at one public Saudi university, they found no link or relationship between social media usage and GPA score. However, they discovered that the most popular social media usage among their students was Twitter, followed by Facebook and then Instagram. A similar comment, as in the previous reviewed study, can be noted here: social media popularity scoring was not clear on the method of acquisition. The study claimed to be quantitative methodology designed, yet there

was no clear design of the questionnaire's questions and it was not clear on the social media tools elected by students, or why there were only 3 social media tools stated in the paper. The results might have been greater if the authors clarified the process of listing such social media tools in their questionnaires.

Correspondingly, Hasan and Gupta (2013) assessed the learning environment of a Saudi medical school in Saudi Arabia and focused only on Saudi female students' perception of the learning environment. By using a survey questionnaire method (with total respondents of 76 female undergraduate students who were enrolled on a medicine and surgery programme), they found dissatisfaction in social support systems, and lecturers were viewed as knowledgeable but authoritarian. Poor scoring despite excellent physical infrastructure invites more investment in human resources and policy reforming. In addition, a qualitative investigation is needed to deepen the results and understand the students' point of view.

In conclusion, the studies reviewed above illustrated a common approach was implemented to reach their results; that was quantitative survey. Such method was conducted with students to test variables, which are part of the learning environments. In some cases, this method was combined with individual or group interviews, as well as observation of the facilities. However, a few studies that based on a qualitative approach to find results were identified. Moreover, most of these studies related to testing new technology and then reported the students' attitudes. Thus, it might be useful to investigate students' perceptions about the new methods and to discover what type of tools that felt would really benefit their learning and help them gain greater knowledge and better outcomes.

Furthermore, it is notable that most of these Saudi Arabian studies have used asynchronous interaction and this may be due to the limitation in the network connection in the country (Alebaikan and Troudi, 2010).

In general, there is limited research related to the learning environment and it would be conducive to better understanding to study more about the student personal learning environment, the relationship between students and the university staff, the atmosphere in which learning and teaching are taking place, and student networking

patterns. In addition, besides the reviewed studies, which are about learning supportive technology, it would be more beneficial if these studies were accompanied by other types of learning support environments such as: investigating campus climates, other learning resources like the existence of the library and its services, supportive learning workshops or programs, and the administrative structure.

2.5.2 Approaches to teaching and development in resource and curriculum

Most studies under this theme are related to teaching strategies.

-Strategies to promote learning:

Limited studies looked at learning through teaching approaches and how such an approach would affect student learning outcomes. In addition, these studies reported which learning strategy students would prefer compared to the traditional lectures. Under this theme, there are two learning strategies which have been studied in Saudi Arabia:

Problem-based learning is the learning strategy which has been most studied, and this has only been researched in relation to medical and health education in Saudi Arabia: one research project at the King Saud University in Riyadh (Al-Farsi *et al.*, 2008), another at Qassim University (Shamsan and Syed, 2009) and a third study at King Abdulaziz University (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2014). These studies evaluated students' satisfaction as a benefit from such a strategy (male and female) and all were positive, but whether knowledge was acquired was not immediately clear. It is noteworthy that Al-Farsi *et al.*'s (2008) sample size was small compared to the other two studies (33 students assigned to three groups: 11 in each group), and their instrument's validity and reliability were not tested.

One article compared the impact of various approaches to learning (traditional, blended and e-learning) on the student experience and their effectiveness (Al-Qahtani and Higginst, 2013). This study was conducted in Umm Al-Qura University in Saudi Arabia, with the participation of 148 undergraduate students. The authors found that there was a statistically significant difference between the three approaches in terms of the students' achieving the preferred blended learning method. Nevertheless, the results might differ if the instructor of these methods was not one of the authors.

Another study by Al-Zahrani (2015) tested the impact of “flipped classroom” on the students’ thinking and understanding. He defined the flipped classroom as an instructional method and a form of blended learning that reverses the traditional learning environment via providing instructional content, usually online, outside of the classroom. It attempts to bring activities, including homework, into the classroom. By implementing two quantitative stages for his research design, a quasi-experimental approach was used on two groups of students (the first group utilised the lecture-based strategy with 28 students and the second group utilised the flipped classroom with 27 students). Then this was followed by a survey questionnaire to assess the students’ experiences with these strategies. Al-Zahrani found that the total score revealed moderate satisfaction and that the flipped classroom might help with students’ creativities. However, I think, with a larger group of students, significant results might be achieved, and preparing students for such a new strategy (by sending emails about the next subject to be discussed and some recommended reading materials, for example) might help them to be more creative, involved and could affect their learning process positively.

Generally, throughout the research reviewed in this theme, common characteristics can be identified: most of these studies are based on one institution, results were identified based on statistical analysis, and it is not clear how approaches to teaching impact on the student learning experience.

2.5.3 Induction and transition

There are few studies investigated the fresher students during their first year at university. The attempts at research are divided into two approaches:

- *The stress emotion of transition among fresher students.*

Two studies identified under this subject heading were conducted by the same group of authors (Al-Daghri *et al.*, 2014) and (Al-Daghri *et al.*, 2014). Both were conducted at King Saud University, at Riyadh. The first study (using questionnaires) confirmed high levels of stress among Saudi Arabian students entering university in their preparatory year: where the participation size was 834 students, 453 males and 381 females. The prevalence of this stress score was higher in women than in men (49.7%

against 40.7%). However, the second study was a follow-up to the first investigation after one year, with 110 students (75 women and 35 men). Although there was a decreased level of perceived stress among the males (48.2% at baseline, and 45.4% at follow-up), this was not really statistically significant. In the females there were no changes noted in the perceived stress scores over the preparatory year. Limitation can be noticed in this study: stress was not measured before college entry and this could explain the high percentage of stress at the baseline, which continued at the same level after follow-up. However, more studies were recommended to measure the stress level of the same students after their third year of entry (as the first year could represent the transition from school to university life and the second year may represent the transition from the preparatory year to a specialized college).

These exploratory studies highlight the need for staff and tutor awareness of the attitudes that students bring with them to university.

- English language skills required at university.

The school education system in Saudi Arabia introduced English-as-a-foreign-language to students from school year seven to year 12. However, English language is used to teach modules at Saudi Arabian universities, therefore universities in Saudi Arabia require a certain level of language skill for students to enter their college. Hence, there is the preparatory first year at Saudi Arabian universities to train students in the required skills and English language is one of these courses (AlMunajjed, 2009). For this reason, few researchers conducted their studies in relation to English language skills required for university. For instance, Elyas (2008) investigated students' attitudes towards using English language in their university studies. This small-scale study, with 65 students who were in their first year, was conducted at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. The descriptive analysis of the questionnaires indicated that studying English language is necessary in order to develop students' understanding, and this will help them to get a job more quickly. However, 21 students out of 65 students (32.3%) stated that their English background was not good because of the previous English educational system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, 33 students out of 65 students (50.7%) stated that they have to take extra English courses outside the university. Another example is Al-Jarf's (2005) study, which was conducted at King Saud University in Riyadh, with 238

female fresher students. Al-Jarf recommended using blended learning with extra materials, quizzes and exercises online alongside face-to-face instructions to improve students' English grammar. Both examples were based on one institution focusing on one group of students rather than the whole cohort of first year students. More investigations are needed to understand this issue better.

To sum up this theme, the studies reviewed here were mainly testing stress and the use of a foreign language in teaching at university and were generally conducted with one class or course. There is a gap in studies containing more evaluation of learning outcomes, the process of induction, student expectation and preparedness for higher education, as well as investigating the required skills other than English for universities and their impact on students' learning outcomes.

2.5.4 Students learning perceptions

One research project on student perception of learning in Saudi Arabia has been identified covering many topics and themes. It is descriptive using surveys and interview methods. Khashan (1984), 30 years ago, studied student perceptions in King Saud University (KSU) in Riyadh, with 420 male students (all of them were freshers and sophomores only). He discovered that the University of KSU had some primarily functional problems. These problems were: (1) the students were not prepared properly from school to enter and achieve success at college. (2) Students had an unhealthy perception of the faculty and administration: as most of the students saw their faculty as not really being concerned about the academic wellbeing of their students. Also, they did not believe that their university was sincere in serving their education needs as they thought that their university was providing them with a poor-quality education. However, they were not asked what they perceived as being a good quality education. (3) The author found issues with students cheating and plagiarism: as for example, students preferred to present a piece of work identical to another one submitted earlier by a diligent student and they believed friendship was a manifestation of loyalty, therefore, they would not hesitate to transfer information to a friend during an examination. (4) There were issues with absorbing and building academic knowledge, which inhibited the development of students' analytical skills. (5) Finally, most of the students saw college as a means of achieving rapid affluence

and they did not understand their academic duties. This study is out dated, and new research is recommended to track student perceptions in the new millennium. Moreover, this old study was only investigating male students and the voice of female students was unheard.

In addition, to build a good understanding of this issue of student perceptions, students need to discuss and reveal what they need their universities to provide so they can approach their learning successfully. They also need to voice exactly what they are expecting from their tutors. Therefore, a qualitative study with in-depth interviewing could help to understand student perceptions.

2.5.5 Quality assurance and enhancement

The Saudi Arabian higher education system has taken major steps to improve its level and to meet international standards as the higher education system initiated a law to protect the quality of education its graduates can expect (Alshayea, 2012). These actions included the establishment of the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) to contribute to the continuing improvement in the quality of higher education in Saudi Arabia (Darandari *et al.*, 2009). The Commission is an independent authority reporting directly to the Higher Education Council and its role is distinct from ministries and government agencies. In addition, in 2009 the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia made it mandatory for higher education institutions to be accredited for academic assessment and quality assurance (Onsman, 2010).

Despite the government's actions to improve the quality of higher education, research in the quality aspect is limited and most of it is related to curriculum assessment. For instance, Khan (2007) assessed the Anatomy curriculum at King Saud University (KSU) by distributing questionnaires to the medical students at the end of their Anatomy course. With 219 respondents (146 males and 73 females) from the Second Year, Khan found that only half of the students felt that the content of the Anatomy curriculum was taught adequately, while the rest of the students thought that the curriculum teaching was too long and not adequately taught. He therefore recommended innovation in the Anatomy curriculum to allow KSU to compete at an

international level. Another example of quality research regarding curriculum is Al-Twajjry's (2010) effort to assess Managerial Accounting courses through undergraduate students' performance (grades) and found that students' performance was very weak at Qassim University. In addition, he found that what contributed to this low performance were the pre-university skills with regard to mathematical ability, which was lacking among those students tested. However, he did not find a link between weekly registered hours and student performance. Far more attention should be given to fresher students during their introductory courses.

More research is needed to improve the quality of Saudi Arabian Higher Education. Research should be conducted at a module level, course level and also after graduation to revise the institutions quality by reference to student experiences.

2.5.6 Cultural influences

There is limited research in the field of cultural influences and how a student's background reflects on their learning experience. However, Eid and Nuhu's (2010) found that knowledge sharing between the students of King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM), where there is a culture of learning and using information technology (IT), has been helped by the culture of learning within the university. This study was conducted only on male students (302 questionnaire respondents). It would therefore be recommended that several other universities are considered for this type of research to study Saudi Arabian students' culture of learning. To also include female respondent would enhance the understanding of this issue.

In addition, Hamdan (2014) found that cultural background affects female students' learning approaches. In her surveyed study about the relationship between the learning culture and online education, 67 female undergraduate students revealed that they have experienced some cultural challenges but then improved their learning and communication skills.

2.6 Conclusion and significance of this thesis

This chapter has introduced a broad range of research related to student learning experience in higher education. Undeniably, learning experience has been studied from many point-of-views (figure 2.3).

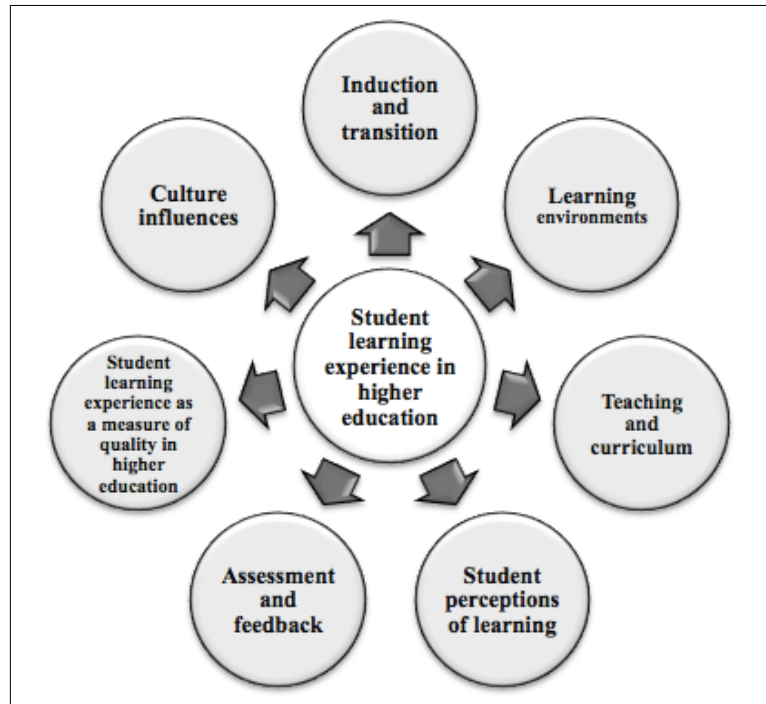


Fig. 2.3: Range of research fields under the student learning experience

Figure 2.3 shows the summarized seven themes that have been found in the literature: learning environments; teaching and curriculum and resources; induction and transition; student perceptions of learning; assessment and feedback; student learning experience as a tool of measuring the quality in higher education; and cultural influences.

However, in Saudi Arabian literature, learning experience research remains at a preliminary phase and few scientific studies have covered the same themes except for the assessment and feedback. This may be because the assessment system is unified and integrated across the higher education institutions. Thus, this system needs to be revised and to update its ability to assess students' knowledge and feedback, to increase the level and quality of Saudi Arabian Higher Education.

This chapter has presented a variety of key concepts associated with each theme related to studying the student learning experience. For instance, with the learning environment theme, there are many related key concepts to learning experience such as (ICT) usage in learning, social connection, pedagogical settings and physical settings.

In addition, it is evident that studying learning experience will affect the enhancement of students' learning and satisfaction, and this will reflect on their learning outcomes, which will in turn affect the quality of learning in the institution. Therefore, placing students in a position of partnership within Higher Education to ensure good quality learning would increase the level of Higher Education as a whole.

Therefore, this PhD study covered students' learning experience in Saudi Arabia, and female experience in particular, to give a recent and updated understanding of what the factors actually are which enhance a student's learning and what the constraining influences may be. By using a qualitative approach through soft system methodology, this study contributed to the knowledge gap in Saudi Arabia, as most of its studies were testing and experimental. In addition, using more than one case study to confirm the research (across various institutions) strengthened the finding of this study. Moreover, this research did not only focus on one class or one level of student, it was general being applied to all students enrolled at the Business College at the time of data collection, where the researcher was not the instructor or the tutor of the participants. Therefore, it was unique to understand female business students' experience in a cultural and religious country such as Saudi Arabia. Hence, the findings of this study did not only apply to Saudi Arabian Higher Education, as they could also influence international higher education institutions to try to fully understand the background experience of students coming from a similar experience, and that, in turn, would contribute to the design of transition courses in other universities and could influence university decision-making.

The next chapter presents the methodological approach used in this research using a Soft system methodology using two case studies and aimed to validate and justify the methodological choices made for the research process.

Chapter 3:

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the qualitative approach that has been applied in this research by using the case study methodology. In addition, it justifies and evaluates the methodological choices used at every stage of this research. It starts by presenting the goals of this research and the main questions it has raised, and then explains the researcher role and how the researcher's epistemological background affected the choice of research methods in this project. Later on, this chapter moves to in-depth discussion of the application of, and justification for choosing, case study methodology for this research. This chapter continues to uncover the methodological decisions to assure the trustworthiness of this study.

In addition, this chapter moves on to discuss the research methods, which have been used in this study to collect the data and to obtain meaning from these data by careful analysis. Moreover, this part explains my research thinking, actions and decisions that all made up part of the research process.

Finally, it summarises the participants' characteristics and the process employed for their recruitment, data collection procedures, and the method of analysing these data along with its justification. Note that this chapter will discuss the ethical considerations associated with this research.

3.2 Aim of the study and research questions

The overall aims of this study were: to explore the nature of the female learning experience in a Saudi Arabian public university setting. This learning experience encompasses the learning environments, goals for Higher Education, attitudes and their own reflection on their learning journey in Saudi Arabia.

Arising from these aims, the following questions were posed:

- Q1.** What are Saudi Arabian women's goals within higher education?
- Q2.** What kind of personal learning environments do women experience in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia?
- Q3.** What are the obstacles that Saudi Arabian undergraduate female students encounter during their learning journey?
- Q4.** How do women describe their learning experience in Saudi Arabian higher education?
- Q5.** What would Saudi Arabian female students suggest to improve their learning experience?

Based on the previous questions, the objectives of this PhD study are:

1. Analyse the quality of the Saudi Arabian female learning experience and the learning tools.
2. Examine women's goals in Higher Education and discover how their goals could affect their learning process.
3. Describe the personal learning environments of participants in Saudi Arabia.
4. Contribute to the knowledge gap about the role of women in relation to Higher Education and development in the academic domain in Saudi Arabia.
5. Review the teaching policy and pedagogy of this domain (the Higher Education sector in Saudi Arabia).

3.3 Theory and research:

Theory is important to the social researcher because it provides a background and rationale for the research that is being conducted (Brayman, 2012). In addition, writing about what I believe in research, and how I see the knowledge being constructed through its relation to the theory, provides a framework for this research to be understood and for the research findings to be interpreted. However, linking between theory and my research is that data collected to build a theory. In other words, this research is done to review inductive theory.

3.3.1 Inductive theory

As has been discussed in the background chapter of this document, the female learning experience in Saudi Arabia has many factors that would influence this

practice, starting with the religion and culture, and ending with the gender segregation law. This process of learning is a rather complex and multi-layered situation, and with a university opened just for female students and staff made it a whole phenomenon worthy of being studied. With not much research on this subject, female learning in Higher Education in a religious cultural environment, calls for the need to understand this complicated setup in depth prior to suggesting any improvement to the level of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, in order to match the level of other universities in developed countries.

This calls for a review of the role of theory in this research and can conclude with a discussion of the implications of the findings, which promote the entire study. As the findings would feedback into theoretical framework, this can be seen as an induction approach as the role of this PhD study is to discover what makes Saudi women's learning experience without testing theories prior to conducting the research. Therefore, the role of this research is to build what could frame a theory that is only applicable to what I, as a researcher, found through the data that represent only these girls at their universities at the time of the interviews. Although I reviewed the literature before collecting data, this was only to understand the subject in general, to know what to expect when planning the data collection and to form general questions that would help me to understand the unique case of these Saudi undergraduate female students. Hence, stating the learning procedures and Saudi Higher Education system was merely to understand the learning situation in Saudi Arabia, and not to deal with it as facts that could evaluate Saudi female students' responses. This PhD purely reviews what Saudi female students experience in their daily learning life towards finding the gap in their learning process.

Inductive theory, that is the design of this research, does not assume any hypothesis, therefore no entities need to be defined or addressed to outline the boundaries of this research (Brayman, 2012), unlike the deductive type of research that drives the process of gathering data according to the hypothesis deduced from an existing theory, which could result in premature theorizing that often leads to the making up of hypotheses (Locke, 2007). In other words, theory is the outcome of this proposed PhD study.

Although inductive studies generate interesting findings, their theoretical meaning might not be entirely clear (Charmaz, 1997), as they provide insightful empirical

generalization, but little theory. One way to limit this case, however, is that once a theory has been generated, the researcher might want to collect further data to establish the conditions in which the theory will and will not hold (Brayman, 2012). This claim will be considered in this study, and it might call for a limitation in this research. As the time permitted to finish this research might only allow an outline of common theory among the collected data, testing this theory might be one of the recommendations for future work.

Nevertheless, inductive strategy, linking data with the suggested theory/theoretical framework, is usually associated with a qualitative research approach (O'Leary, 2010), which will be discussed later in this chapter. However, inductive strategy is not the only issue related to this research and its design, as my epistemological and ontological positions have affected the way this research has been conducted, as is discussed below.

3.4 Epistemological consideration (worldview):

Worldviews generally are a direct result of the nature of the research formed by the beliefs and disciplines held by individual researchers, and often lead researchers to apply quantitative, qualitative or mixed method approaches to their research (Creswell, 2009). Others have called them *paradigms* (such as Lincoln & Guba, 2000); *epistemologies* (such as Crotty, 1998), or *broadly conceived research methodologies* (as Neuman, 2000). Philosophical worldviews remain largely hidden in research (Slife & Williams, 1995) but they still influence the practice of research and need to be identified (Creswell, 2009).

Considering the paradigm position of this PhD research will explain the view of the researcher (myself) on studying the social world. Hence, I see that the social world cannot be studied according to the same procedures, principles, and philosophy as the natural sciences, as I believe that there are differences between people and the object of the natural sciences and I respect this (as a researcher). I therefore have to understand the subjective meaning of social action. This position is known as: *Interpretivism*.

3.4.1 Interpretivism

From an interpretivist viewpoint looking at phenomena (unrelatedly to our knowledge about this phenomena) we might get a clearer understanding, new meaning, or confirm our understanding of that phenomena, and that could be applied, even if we cannot detach our own understanding of a particular phenomenon, as we can still explore the understanding of others (Crotty, 1998).

However, the main reasons for choosing the interpretive approach is that I wanted to explore the female learning experience in a Saudi Arabian university, to study the issues, attitudes, expectations and perceptions of being an undergraduate student at a government university, and then to discover their own learning environments. This approach means building a base on individual people's perceptions, assumptions about themselves, the situations they find themselves in, and recognises that every individual's worldview is different, resulting from multiple realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Hence, my research is about studying and understanding the ways in which students interpret their world. Furthermore, the way I analysed these experiences was similarly inspired by what has been reported during the investigation. Therefore, when presenting the results, I only used participants' own words to help in describing their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), through my interpretation of what they said, guided by their own point of view. In addition, answering the main research questions was fed by the students' views only, as the main goal of this research is to see Saudi female undergraduate students through their own eyes and words.

3.5 Ontological considerations:

Social ontology is very much related to the nature of social entities (Brayman, 2012). The core point of focus here is the nature of reality and the nature of things, whether they are external to the social factors or built up from the perceptions and actions of social factors. Moreover, ontology and epistemology sit together, underlying the theoretical perspective of "how we know" and what we understand knowledge to be (Crotty, 1998).

However, I believe that a truth or interpretation we, as people, hold results from our interactions with the world, and that understanding and interpretation has been shaped by the social values, which exist in our world. This position is known as: *Constructivism*.

3.5.1 Social Constructivism

Constructivism is seen as an approach to qualitative research and a perspective on interpretation (Creswell, 2009). This position allows me, as a researcher, to look at the studied situation, not narrowed down, but rather to consider its complex ideas and sets, as it is based on human “social” interactions, and on the participants’ views on the situation being studied, with more open-ended questions letting them construct their own meaning for a situation (Brayman, 2012). This school of thought focuses on contexts where people live and work to understand the historical and cultural settings of people that participate in a study (Creswell, 2009). As the intent of this PhD research is to understand the meanings others have about the world, rather than starting with a theory, constructivism is the most appropriate position to develop the theory as research progresses, and after data collection (Locke, 2007).

However, researchers need to understand their subjective interpretation and position themselves within the research to discuss their own background influence on the research (will be explained later in greater detail in the “5.8 Researcher role”).

My ontological approach for this study is that the nature of the learning experience, which is a social construction, is external to people and is imposed on them. The cultures, subcultures and religious faith surrounding us provide us with meanings which we understand, or we learn their meanings as part of our existence, and they shape our thinking and behaviour (Crotty, 1998). Saudi Arabian culture that related to the expression of personal feelings and emotions (especially when it comes to religious manners) is not common and the communication processes are closed and at a relatively superficial level (Altamimi, 2011). Consequently, asking students to ‘open up’ and reveal such expression is at conflict with the cultural norms, and it is expected based on their social experiences, individuals may have constructed their own understanding of the learning experience. It is my role to construct their own understanding of their world, taking into account these cultural issues. The knowledge

about the female learning experience in a Saudi Arabian government university setting is a lived experience and of a personal nature. With an interpretivism framework, I have been able to understand the social reality of the learning experience for a number of participants. Consequently, when discussing the results of this research and answering the main research questions, I used the students' own words and kept referring to them to construct their realities through my understanding of their own words. Here, I do not discard their views if they contradict the published Saudi statistics about learning in Higher Education; I only view students' perceptions and learning strategies, without judging their experiences.

To place this research with worldview and with the ontology consideration: the assumption about the reality and the nature of things (ontological assumptions) gives rise to the way of researching and enquiring into the reality of things (epistemological assumption). These in turn, give rise to methodological considerations, which gives rise to issues of instrumentation and data collection (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). Indefinite, added to ontology and epistemology is axiology (the values and beliefs that we hold) (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

Axiology, however, is an important factor influencing the research study at any or all points in the course of conducting the research. It is neither possible nor desirable for researchers to keep their values from influencing aspects of the research study and objectives in their research (Lichtman, 2013 and Bryman, 2012). Therefore, many bias and values intrusions may occur.

However, before becoming a researcher, I am a Saudi Arabian female and have lived and grown up in Saudi Arabia, being raised by a Saudi Arabian family that infused me with all the common cultural traditions which are practiced in Saudi Arabia. In addition, I have experienced learning in a Saudi Arabian public university for my undergraduate study. All of these experiences are very common or similar to the subject that I wish to investigate in this research, so I have my own point of view with respect to the issues and barriers which any Saudi Arabian female student in a university may face, and I have my own beliefs about learning in a CCTV lecture with a male tutor. Therefore, I tried to look at this research from an objective point of view but could not eliminate my own thoughts regarding some issues like: giving

males much freedom to choose whatever field they want to study in, and them having much more flexibility when it comes to things such as leaving the university for a break and then coming back to lectures. Moreover, I know and understand that CCTV lectures are not a problem by themselves as a teaching method, but I know that it is related to the tutor himself in dealing with this type of technology to make the session attractive and interesting to students, as I have attended what I called an attractive CCTV lecture and a boring one all within my undergraduate course. However, to deal with my own values and opinions, I kept believing that my experience in learning could be different from at least the first case study as it was in a different city and university and involved slightly different people with different settings. In the KAU case, I kept believing that my experience in learning could be unlike that of the current participants as I belong to an older generation that could have a different way of thinking and dealing with learning compared to the current, younger generation, who have updated technologies and learning resources. I could not be value free, but to minimise the incursion of values in the research process, I had to be self-reflective, exhibiting *reflexivity* (more in part 5.9.2). About the part played by such factors, I kept writing reflection memos, by formulating the interview questions and observation checklist to suit the process of collecting the data and the interaction with participants during the interviews. I had to use many validation tools to make sure the questions were correct, and to ask myself whether there was any bias in these questions. I considered ethics in my all research processes. Moreover, I tried to minimise the sympathy that I felt during interviews for some students who had expressed their situation regarding their male guardians (fathers, brothers or husbands) who could be playing an important role in their learning experience. Firstly, I had to make participants feel that it was acceptable to express their feeling without being judged by myself, and I had to keep my facial expressions normal (neither smiling nor sad), just listening and reminding participants that their ID would be confidential (to make them feel comfortable) and confirming that it was acceptable to talk about this issue (when only the participant brought up this issue during her interview) as it is part of their learning experience. However, if they did not talk about it or did not raise this issue, I would not ask about it at all. Although I was surprised by some of the views that students held, which have inevitably affected my data and its analysis, I had to minimise my emotions towards those views by seeking initial approval from the interviewees at the end of each interview, while the voice recorder

was still on, by summarising my understanding of their points of view to ensure that it represented their experiences.

This situation is more related to the researcher role and participant role, and this will be discussed further in later parts of this chapter (in point 5.8), which still falls within values and beliefs.

However, some qualitative researchers apologise for their beliefs and talk about how they try to keep their beliefs out of the research (Lichtman, 2013) and this is what I am doing during and at the end of this research. Having identified this fact, I took the qualitative strategy to be my guidance in answering the core research questions.

3.6 Research strategy

There are two words in research language: qualitative and quantitative. O'Leary (2008) stated that these terms are not appropriate to describe a researcher, or for that matter a methodology or method, as these terms are adjectives for types of data and the types of analysis. In addition, others have called them *approaches to inquiry* or *strategies of inquiry* such as (Cresswell, 2007 & 2009) or *research methodologies* such as (Mertens, 1998).

However, the approach for this research study is a **qualitative** strategy that rejects positivist 'rules', unlike quantitative, (Creswell, 2009) and works at accepting multiple realities through the study of a small number of in-depth cases, and is sometimes improvised (O'Leary, 2010). As the main objective of conducting this research study is to explore an activity in depth (learning experience) in a particular society (Saudi Arabian public university) of a specific group of people (Saudi Arabian female undergraduate students), it was decided that the most appropriate research strategy would be the qualitative tradition.

Table 3.1: Fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research strategies (Bryman, 2004 & O’Leary, 2010).

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Role of theory in relation to research	Deductive; testing of theory	Inductive; generation of theory
Epistemological orientation	Natural science model, in particular positivism	Interpretivism
Ontological orientation	Objectivism	Constructionism
Paradigm/assumptions	Positivism, empiricism.	Subjectivism, interpretivism, constructivism.
Methods	Large scale, surveys, random control trials.	Small scale, interviewing, observation, document analysis
Analysis	Statistics	Thematic exploration

Qualitative research relies on verbal and visual communication to answer questions, as it examines humans in their natural settings rather than in experimental environments (Lichtman, 2013). Linking that to the main aim of this study, which is to explore the nature of the learning experience of Saudi Arabian female undergraduates, would be compliant, as by implementing qualitative strategy that would help to reach this aim within the natural setting of Saudi Arabian government universities. Moreover, the trigger of this research was the declining level of Saudi Arabian universities compared to universities within the developed countries, and this strategy would help to “*know the story behind the numbers*” (Mayan, 2009, p.10). However, the uniqueness of qualitative research is that it can be represented as an umbrella term that includes many different ways of studying humans (Brayman, 2012). It can offer the flexibility of choosing the most appropriate approach to the situation being studied, using an accessible tactic for certain groups. In addition, qualitative researchers can select data collection methods that are comfortable and offer them rich information.

Qualitative research is a term for which researchers do not clearly agree one definition; (Olson, 1995; Simmons-Mackie & Damico, 2003; and Schwandt, 2007). Nevertheless, Lichtman’s definition can be used here for the purpose of this research:

“Qualitative research is a general term. It is a way of knowing in which a researcher gathers, organizes and interprets information obtained from humans using his or her eyes and ears as filters. It often involves in-depth interviews and/or observations of humans in natural, online, or social settings. It can be contrasted with quantitative research, which relies heavily on hypothesis testing, cause and effect, and statistical analyses” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 7).

Qualitative strategy is the link that related my worldview as a researcher and my ontology position in this research, as it is associated with the constructivism perspective and it deals with specifics and then moves to the general (inductive theory). It begins by gathering a considerable amount of data, and then records all information in a database. It then, uses analysis techniques to code particular issues that will then lead to constructed themes, and finally moves from these themes to more general statements (similar to theory) based on the specific findings for these data.

However, argument has arisen against qualitative study designs stating that they are less specific and precise, and do not have the same structural depth as quantitative study designs (Kumar, 2011). On the other hand, researchers have argued that this type of concern has to do with investigators, who have not followed systematic procedure, or have allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions (Yin, 2009). Consequently, I tried including a system for data collection and wrote a plan before actually conducting the field work, considering ethical issues, and outlined some risks that could occur during the data collection.

Moreover, other challenges face qualitative research such as the argument about the validity, reliability, and generalisability of evaluating qualitative research.

Validity is an important key to effective research, as if a piece of research is invalid then it is worthless (Cohen; Manion and Morrison, 2011). In qualitative data the subjectivity of respondents, their opinions, attitudes and perspectives, together contribute to a degree of bias. Validity, then, should be dealt with as a matter of degree rather than as an absolute state (Gronlund, 1981). More recently validity has

taken many forms in qualitative data, such as honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation, and the objectivity of the researcher (Winter, 2000).

Reliability, on the other hand, is a synonym for dependability, consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over group of respondents (Cohen; Manion and Morrison, 2011). However, the concept of reliability is largely related to positivism, and the types of reliability differ in quantitative and qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1994). As quantitative research assumes the possibility of replication (the same methods are used with the same sample) then the results should be the same, including a degree of control and manipulation of phenomena (Le Compte and Preissle, 1993). On the other hand, it is difficult to achieve this in qualitative research (Le Compte and Goetz, 1982), as freezing the social settings and circumstances of a previous study to make it replicable is not possible, and that is qualitative researchers' strength rather than their weakness (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). However, there are some suggestions which can be introduced to meet the requirement of reliability; a qualitative researcher replicating ethnographic research needs to adapt a similar social role to that adapted by the original researcher, or else what a researcher sees and hears will not be comparable with the original research (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed specified terms to establish assessment of the quality of the qualitative research as an alternative to reliability and validity. They suggested: *trustworthiness* criteria and that is what has been followed in this research project (which will be explained in detail later in this chapter).

The mixed methods approach, on the other hand, is growing ever more common in social research (O'Leary, 2010). It originated in 1959 but was less well known than either qualitative or quantitative approaches (Creswell, 2009). It can, however, capitalize on the best of both traditions, qualitative and quantitative, and overcome many of their individual shortcomings. In addition, it allows for the use of both inductive and deductive reasoning, which renders its results more generalizable

(Brayman, 2012). However, many philosophers argued that both traditions, qualitative and quantitative, do not allow for a mixed approach (O'Leary, 2010).

On balance, the choice should always be based on what is useful in answering the research questions. After all, what we are after is the most appropriate approach in a real world situation (Lichtman, 2013).

3.7 Research Methodology

O'Leary (2010) defined Research Methodology as an overarching, macro level and framework that offers principles and reasoning associated with particular paradigmatic assumptions which legitimate various schools of thought or research. Moreover, she stated that methodology provides both strategies and grounding for the conduct of a study.

In the qualitative approach, the numbers and types of methodologies became more visible during the 1990s and into the 21st Century (Creswell, 2009). However, there are various types of strategies under the qualitative approach: it reached 19 strategies as Wolcott (2001) summarized them in his book. However, the most appropriate strategy for this PhD Study is the Soft System Methodology that can help the researcher to build up an understanding of such a complex and dynamic situation. However, following the steps of *Case Study* methodology is the first step to organize the data collection from two different cities (Jeddah and Riyadh) and it enabled the Researcher to discover new areas of research and situations.

Case studies tend to explore in-depth a program, event, activity, process or one or more individual (Creswell, 2009). Given the subject of this research that related to learning activity, which made this PhD project bounded in time and to a certain activity. Therefore, applying case study strategy would direct this research to the final results much better than using other strategies under the qualitative approach, as, for example, *Ethnography* (the study of a cultural group) is more associated with a long period of investigation, rather than one year as available for this PhD project.

However, case study strategy allows researchers to collect data by using various data collection procedures that could help them to understand the cases more in-depth over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995). This will not require the researchers to get involved in this research as their role is to understand and interpret the situation through the participant's point of view (Creswell, 2009), unlike the *phenomenology strategy* that requires researchers to engage with the investigation, setting aside their own experiences to understand the studied phenomena over a long time of living it alongside the participants (Moustakas, 1994 and Nieswiadomy, 1993).

Moreover, at the end of case study research, the views from the participants will be used to construct theories and themes (O'Leary, 2010) whereas *Narrative research*, another type of qualitative strategy, combines participants' life stories with those of the researcher's life experience in a collaborative narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). However, this might conflict with the current PhD project, if a *Narrative* approach was conducted and might mislead the results.

Using case study in educational research like this PhD, makes it possible to enhance the understanding of contexts, communities and individuals (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013). In addition, it enables researchers to construct a research approach that allows the complexity of teaching and learning to be captured, as well as the context and communities surrounding them.

Moreover, case study has been used successfully across history in educational research. It began to gain great prominence in the 1970s in the UK and the USA as a reaction against the heavily quantitative base in research that focused on measurement and statistical analysis as a resource for achieving valid and valuable insights into the education field (Elliott and Lukes, 2008). While case study continues to play an important part in education research, in the 1990s and early twenty-first Century (in the UK and USA in particular) concerns over it being simplistic and the idea of what works and reflects 'good' research have arisen (Oancea and Pring, 2008). Case study succeeds in the face of such a challenge to education research and has been able to offer a deeper understanding in a real context rather than providing merely objective evidence (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

Many important researchers have contributed to the development of the case study. **Stenhouse** (1978, 1979) for instance, was an early supporter of case study in education research. He introduced ethnographic case study in education research. In addition, he enhanced the verification and quality in case study by arguing that for research to be verifiable, field notes should be available as an important record of the study.

Robert Yin's work (1983), on the other hand, was one of the few books on case study available in the 1980s. His background is in quantitative works, and he sees case study as a method. In addition, he has identified three forms of case study (2009): exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. However, in the matter of case study verification, he claimed: different definitions of quality need to be considered.

Robert Stake, however, does not characterise case study as a method, but instead as an object of choice with respect to the particularity to be studied. He argues the point that a case study highlights uniqueness whilst also encouraging the readers of the case to reach a new understanding of their own context and processes. Unlike Yin (2009), his social science approach is based strongly on qualitative ways of thinking and methods. Stake's writing emphasizes the need for each researcher to define case study, again bearing in mind what they have learned about the possible appearances of the case.

Andrew Pollard, nevertheless, focused during the 1980s and 1990s on using case study as a longitudinal strategy to capture the nature of learning. He supports the idea of a reflective researcher undertaking education and learning research.

Considering all these writers' efforts, case study has evolved as an approach to research that can capture rich data that gives an in-depth picture of a unit or an aspect of that unit (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

The quality of female learning experience in a Saudi Arabian university is intangible, yet its impact on a university's operation is very tangible. This suggests that in order to investigate the students' opinions, barriers and issues, and the quality of their learning outcomes, it is important to conduct qualitative methodology for data

collection in order to understand other factors which may influence the quality of the female learning experience in Saudi Arabian Higher Education. Case study will be used for the empirical data collection, using verbal and visual data, in order to gather rounded, reliable data, as well as an in-depth understanding of the situation.

Choosing case study methodology was based on its unique strength and its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence, such as interviews, documents and observations, allowing me to retain meaningful characteristics of real-life events (the Higher Education learning event) (Yin, 2009).

Moreover, case study data is strong in reality but challenging to organise, while other research data is weak in reality but suitable for ready organisation (Cohen; Manion and Morrison, 2011). The strength in reality is that case studies are down to earth, attention gripping and conform to the readers' own experiences, and therefore provide a natural basis for results. Consequently, this might influence policy provision based on its reality results and "themes", as one of the strengths of case studies is that they can recognise the complexity of the social truth (Linchtman, 2013). By attending to learning situations, this case study can represent something of the differences or conflicts in the viewpoints held by the student participants.

Furthermore, case study is capable of serving multi audience (Cohen; Manion and Morrison, 2011). This advantage would serve the main purpose of this research that may contribute towards the democratisation of decision-making and knowledge itself, as these results could be read by anyone (academic and non-academic readers) and allow readers to judge the implications of this study for themselves.

This qualitative case study is obtaining greater understanding of Saudi Arabian female learning in Saudi Arabia and wants to appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of learning in Saudi Arabian Higher Education together with its interaction with the wider context. However, the analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases would be more powerful than those coming from a single case alone (Yin, 2009). The design of this study has used multiple-case design, as such design has increased in frequency in recent years (Yin, 2009). The first case study was conducted in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia, located in the middle of Saudi Arabia, at

Princess Nora Bint Abdulrahman University. The second case study was in Jeddah, the Second city of Saudi Arabia, located on the West coast, at King Abdulaziz University, the oldest and most prestigious university in the Western Province. The rationale of choosing these two universities from the 25 universities in Saudi Arabia is that Princess Nora Bint Abdulrahman University is the first university in Saudi Arabia only for young women: all students, staff and tutors are female. This makes this university a unique phenomenon, as it opened in 2009. In addition, the Researcher, myself, would gain easy access to all its campuses as this university is my sponsor for this PhD study. However, the analytic benefits from having two case studies may be substantial. Therefore, it has been decided to conduct the other case study as well. The reason for choosing King Abdulaziz University was that it has vast experience in teaching higher education and was the first university to be established in Saudi Arabia in 1967. In addition, it has two campuses: one for women and another for men. However, I thought having this comparison case study would be powerful in terms of the results and recommendations, as the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study might therefore be regarded as being more robust (Herriott & Firestone, 1983).

However, these two case study designs are considered to be variants within the same methodological framework, as the same sampling techniques, questions and observation criteria will be implemented for both universities (*replication*). The replication approach to multiple-case studies is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

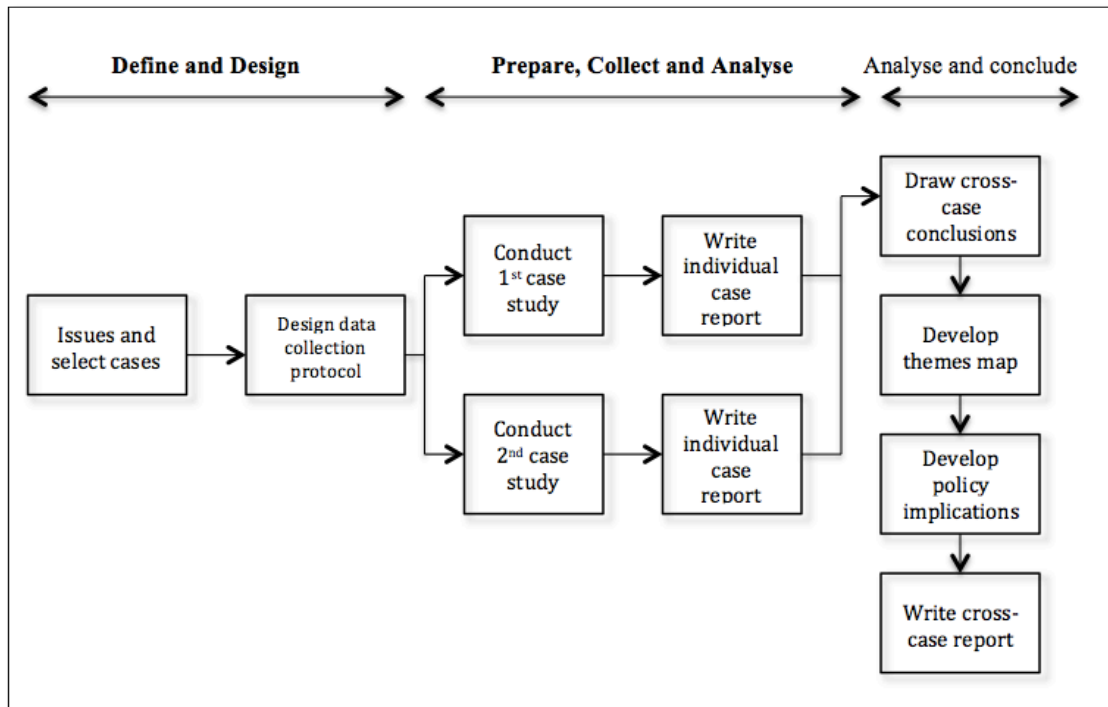


Figure 3.1: Case Study Methodology (influenced by Yin, 2009).

This figure shows that the initial step in designing the study must be the literature review and identifying issues that help to recognise the perceived problem in human interaction. Issue statements or issue questions provide a powerful conceptual structure for organising the study of a case. This study’s issue was “Female learning experiences in Saudi Arabian Higher Education”. Choosing this issue would help to understand the complex life of the case. That would not suppose that Saudi Arabian universities, authorities, tutors or students were performing poorly, but would suppose that all systems are under some stress, that all personnel face problems, and that studying how female students deal with stress and problems contributes to the understanding of the case (Stake, 1995).

In addition, Figure 3.1 shows that case selection and the description of specific measures are important steps in the design and data collection process. Each individual case study contains a whole study, in which evidence and results are required regarding the conclusions and themes for the case. Results for both individual cases should be the focus of the summary report. For each individual case, there will be a report indicating how and why a particular decision was or was not

demonstrated. Across cases, the report should reflect the summary of results for both cases and how they would give the same or contrasting results.

Although case study design has strengths, several authors have claimed weaknesses. Nisbet and Watt (1984), for example, claim qualitative inquiries and case study are biased and subjective, and that their ethical risks are substantial.

A qualitative researcher's intent to endorse a subjective research paradigm is a given, but subjectivity is not seen as a failing needing to be removed, as it is an essential element of understanding (Stake, 1995). Nevertheless, readers and researchers are usually misinterpreted the personal understanding of a researcher (Phillips, 1990). Shortfalls can be overcome by planning the method of interpretation and by being clear about the role of the researcher (which will be discussed in the next point, as it has been considered in this research) (Stake, 1995). Qualitative researchers have respectable concern for validation, therefore Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggested: trustworthiness criteria and this is what has been followed in this research project (will be explained in detail in this Chapter at point 5.9). Moreover, this study also considered Stake's (1995) recommendation for validity, triangulation and member checking.

3.8 Researcher role

The researcher plays a fundamental role in the qualitative case study research (Lichtman, 2013). The researcher is responsible for analysing the data through an interpretive process and has to make sense of the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). However, it is important to remember that the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, as all information is filtered through the researcher's eyes and ears and is influenced by his or her experience, knowledge, skill and background (Lichtman, 2013). In addition, the case study researcher plays many different roles, or follows varying styles in designing, studying, writing and consulting, consciously or unconsciously and has options as to how they will be played (Stake, 1995). These roles might affect the way the researcher interprets the case. Therefore, it is important to explain each role that I think I undertook while conducting this research.

3.8.1 The Case Researcher as Teacher:

I followed this role as I see my research position as being not merely to fulfill the knowledge gap. I believe that this research will contribute to the enhancement of learning in Saudi Arabian Higher Education by reporting what is actually going on there in universities: via the participants' eyes and experience. To report and explore the situation I have to position myself as a teacher, to teach and to educate readers about the current situation. This has helped in designing instruments to collect data (the questions, the checklist for observation and the way of taking pictures) as I had to think about how these would teach the readers. These prospective readers are not all close at hand, so I had to create imaginary readers to be able to consider their needs in understanding this case study. Certainly, real readers are better; so I used friends, colleagues, spouse, family and passersby to negotiate draft materials, and to help when designing questions with these real and imaginary readers, to see how familiar the words and experiences are, and to see how attractive my writing and reporting was, but not too much (Stake, 1995). These alternatives are only representative partly of real ones. However, the main goal of this role is to approach the task of this case study with a certain dedication to the readers and with the competence of a good teacher, as teaching is not just lecturing or delivering information, it is in fact the arrangement of opportunities for learners to follow a natural human desire to become educated. In this situation, learners are the readers.

3.8.2 The Case Researcher as Advocate:

Although I follow the role of teacher in doing this case study, which is important as a carrier of learning, as a researcher my results and themes are nonetheless expected to carry the message, not needing advocacy, as researchers are permitted to indicate that their findings might be extrapolated, and how these were interpreted in various circumstances while accommodating that with theoretical discourse (Stake, 1995). Therefore, I will try to describe the situation and the phenomenon of learning in a Saudi Arabian public university not as a definite truth, because my own interpretation would be shaped by the method, the mood and my own experience. I will not make it appear value free, as this is not the aim of this research. I will explain with some level of advocacy (what I understood and saw) but will acknowledge myself and my position to the readers, as I believe that every phenomenon has many interpretations, and readers might interpret even my own interpretation differently.

3.8.3 The Case Researcher as Evaluator:

Most case studies are not evaluation studies, but some researcher's interpretation will be evaluative in nature, so in that sense, the case researcher is always an evaluator (Stake, 1995). Within this role I tried to present the students' experience as closely as possible to their reality, as the aim of this research is to explore but not to evaluate the system or to judge the curriculum. In my interview questions and in the observation checklist I followed the semi-structure technique to eliminate my effects; as these questions and criteria of observation have been reviewed before conducting the fieldwork many times with researchers and field specialists, as well as my supervisors. In addition, I triangulated my methods of data collection recourses and even sent the interview questions in the form of a survey to all students of the Business School to obtain as much information as I could, as I thought seeing and writing answers by students without knowing or seeing me may lead to information or a point of view that might not be easy to talk about face to face. Overall, I wanted the readers of my research to understand the merit of the case.

3.8.4 The Case Researcher as Biographer:

This research study is a type of education research, which deals only with a phase of a life, that life is explored against a thematic network that deals with persons (students), which makes me a Biographer in this part of the exploration. However, many authors opt for the instrumental case study, writing more for the illustration of an idea rather than for the understanding of the individual's life (Sheehan, 1988). Therefore, I have to take up the challenge in writing and analysing interviews, to present each student as a complex human being as there is no such thing as a single dimension life.

3.8.5 The Case Researcher as Interpreter:

My research acknowledges that meaning is built based on each person's perceptions and assumptions about themselves and the situations, and recognises that every individual's worldview is different, resulting in the existence of multiple realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, my role as a researcher and interpreter is to transform students' understanding with elegant complexity and to be an agent of new interpretation and new knowledge, but without illusion. Therefore, the participant's own words are used to help in describing experiences. In addition, during interviews with students I attempted (while the voice recorder was still running) to summarize what I have understood from each interviewee to get confirmation on that and to

decrease the level of my axiology in this research. Moreover, in one of my observations on lectures, I showed the tutor who was teaching in that lecture my notes, to see if she saw the situation differently or if I wrote illusions, and she agreed with what I noticed, and I recorded that in my own reflection. In fact, that was the one and only time I have done this.

Overall, many researchers have come to believe that what exists out in the world can be understood as it is mediated through observing, and there is no “getting it right” because there are many rights (Lichtman, 2013).

3.9 Trustworthiness of the Study

A **bias** is a preference that constrains fair judgment, as it has been linked to qualitative research and made a topic that challenges both researchers and their professors (Lichtman, 2013). Some writers suggested that it could be eliminated or controlled by: triangulation and using multiple sources (such as Stake (1995)), or/with careful and systematic work (such as Yin (2009)). Others see that determined objectivity by decreasing bias is not important for much of qualitative research, and that the qualitative researcher is, of course, biased as he/she has views on the topic (Lichtman, 2013). Justifying that belief, she stated that after all a researcher probably would not be investigating a particular topic if she/he had not thought about this topic. However, I think that I should make sure that this study will not be weak in its results or methods, as there are several stances taken to reduce the “subjectivity” of the qualitative researcher. Some use a technique which is called **bracketing**, where an effort is made to try to identify the researcher’s view on the topic and then these are put aside (Tufford & Newman, 2012). However, some writers have suggested that qualitative studies should be evaluated according to different criteria from those used by quantitative researchers to assess the work in relation to reliability and validity (Bryman, 2012).

Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) maintain that it is compulsory to identify ways and terms of assessing the quality of qualitative research that provide an alternative to validity and reliability: trustworthiness, to provide evidence of research that has been conducted in a thorough, complete and fair manner. Trustworthiness has been used in qualitative research to answer the criteria of consistency in quantitative

research in terms of external and internal validity and reliability (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness is a term used in qualitative research to define how the study is dependable in relation to the phenomena studied and the depth to which there is demonstrated evidence of the emerging theory in the data gathered (Shenton, 2004).

The criterion used for assessing the rigor of this research is the trustworthiness criteria: credibility, reflexivity, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln 2000).

3.9.1 Credibility

The criterion of credibility is parallel to the criterion of internal validity in quantitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Credibility or feasibility is an aspect of social reality that a researcher is going to use to determine its acceptability to others (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, to establish the credibility of the research findings involves both ensuring that research is carried out according to the principles of good practice and submitting the research findings to members within the same field as the case study, and who have participated, for confirmation that the investigator has correctly understood that social world (Bryman, 2012). The initial tactic is referred to the ethical committee for approval, which was granted for this study by the Brighton Business School Ethics Committee, and the latter technique is often referred to as **respondent validation** or **member validation**.

In the “member checking” process the actor, or participant, is requested to examine rough drafts or writing where the action or words of the participant are featured, when no further data will be collected from him/her (Stake, 1995). In this study, while interviews were conducted, I had to check my understanding of the participants’ interpretation and their insight on the learning experience, as I had to repeat what I understood from them at the end of each interview and when the voice recorder was still running, to have their early approval of my understanding. However, I have sent a copy of my final analysis results to each participant and gave them the chance to review, comment on and contribute to the findings. Although Hobbs (1993) and Skeggs (1994) believe that actors cannot be as deeply involved in the project as the researcher and will not be able to see all the analytic manoeuvres made by the

researcher and will not make sense of what has been written. They therefore recommend a more careful use of respondents. However, I will try to make my report writing easy to read and hopefully acceptable and accessible for varying levels of readers, as the participating actors were varied, because there were undergraduate students, tutors, doctors and professors. Moreover, the final results of both cases will be sent to experts in qualitative studies.

Another technique Guba and Lincoln (1994) have recommended, which I used in this research, is **Triangulation**. It involves using more than one method or data source in the study of a phenomenon (Bryman, 2012). In addition, using more than one method would result in greater confidence in the findings (Denzin, 1989), so I checked my observations with interview questions to determine whether I had misunderstood what I had seen in lectures and in the virtual learning environment of students' accounts. Their responses so far confirm some of my descriptions, and often some of my interpretation. But frequently, I realised that the case is not as simple as I first presumed. Moreover, I only once used a type of co-observer from an alternative viewpoint (Denzin, 1989), as in one of my observations in lectures, I showed the tutor who was teaching in that lecture my notes, to check whether she saw the situation differently and whether what I wrote was an illusion, and she agreed with what I noticed, and I recorded that in my own reflection. In fact, this was the one and only time I did this. Furthermore, I used multiple approaches within a case study: observation, interview, questionnaire, and from many resources: students, tutors (male and female), administrators, technicians and supervisors, to illuminate or invalidate some extraneous influences (Stake, 1995). However, for many qualitative researchers, the procedures of triangulation have come to be the search for additional interpretations rather than the confirmation of a single meaning (Flick, 1992). Personally, I see that as a strong point rather a weakness, as it illustrates the complexity of a case such as the learning experience.

Trustworthiness in the data of interviews was demonstrated by the voice recording of interviews. My supervisors reviewed the data and coding regularly as the study progressed. Although there were concerns voiced about recording and transcribing interviews being unnecessary, as this could waste valuable research time and interrupt

the analysis (Glaser, 1998), I audio recorded all interviews and they have been all be transcribed to ensure that the context of the interviews was not misinterpreted.

During supervisory meetings, critical feedback on my interpretations provided guidance to help refine the analysis. Their knowledge of qualitative research combined with their experience in a Higher Education institution added to the credibility of the research.

3.9.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a term which implies that social researchers should be reflective about the implications of their methods, values, biases and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they generate, and that this is related to the researcher's cultural, political and social context (Bryman, 2012).

The systematic self-examination of researcher biases, values and interest is needed to provide awareness of the researcher's place within this study and how the researcher shapes the study. Moreover, reflexivity presents a level of honesty and openness for the research (Berg, 2004).

This case study has been investigated in an environment, culture and experience perspective similar to that which I, as a researcher, have been through in my undergraduate experience. In addition, this study focused on female students and their involvement in learning in Higher Education, and that could be mixed with my own experience as a young woman who used to be a student in a Saudi Arabian university. Therefore, I had to write my own reflection (memo-writing notes) before and during the data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The reason I wrote down my own learning experience and shared it with my supervisors was to be in a clear position regarding what I hold as knowledge of this case and where my own position regarding this learning experience actually is. However, I kept writing reflection during my data collection and fieldwork to remind myself of the daily basic decisions I made and to clarify the circumstances that led to me making these decisions and the reasons why. By writing this I justified each step I took and by reading them daily on my fieldwork I learned from them. This reduced the extent to which my own values and beliefs

could affect my research. However, sharing these reflection memos with my supervisors during the fieldwork had made them keep track of what I was doing and made me consider their point of view in reducing my bias. Moreover, these reflections helped me to control myself and not to show my own sympathy during an interview with any student who faced problems with her guardians (father, brother, or husband) as I know some of them could be treating their females unfairly, so I had to position myself in the grey area when investigating this matter and ensure that I did not influence any of the answers. However, I cannot be value free; so, I acknowledged my own position in my thesis too and as interpretivism I allowed space to understand the case, as there is no one reality of the truth, as reality is just as multi-layered.

3.9.3 Transferability

This is also referred to as generalisability, which means that the findings and results of qualitative research are not generalisable in the same way that quantitative results are considered to be (Bryman, 2012). However, in order to achieve such an approach this research will follow what Greetz (1973) calls **thick description**, which means providing a rich account of the case. In addition, thick description provides others with a database which allows them to make judgments about the transferability of the findings to another study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At the end of this study I will provide thick and detailed description of how this research was done, and what I did exactly, justifying each process and decision. I will address in detail my role as a researcher in this study, explaining my approach and its rationale, and sufficient information to determine what was done. Adding clear explanation and specific details about methodology helps the readers to understand and make critical judgments about suitability and appropriateness (Lichtman, 2013).

3.9.4 Dependability

Dependability is a parallel term to reliability in quantitative research, and it establishes the merit of research in terms of the norm of trustworthiness. Researchers should adopt an '**auditing**' approach (Guba, 1985). Therefore, I made sure to complete all my records and memos at all phases of this research process: problem formulation, selection of research participants, fieldwork notes and handwritten notes,

interview transcripts, data analysis decisions, and so on. All were kept in secure accessible files stored in my house, and some of them had been uploaded to my account in student folio (<https://studentfolio.brighton.ac.uk/mahara/>). Peers would then act as auditors (possibly during the progress of research, but certainly at the end) to find how far appropriate procedures were being/had been followed.

3.9.5 Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with ensuring that complete objectivity is implemented in social research (Bryman, 2012). I have to determine that I acted in good faith in this research and did not allow personal values or theoretical preferences to influence the results and the conclusions of the research driven from it. An audit trail can establish the confirmability of this study (Guba, 1985). This audit includes raw data (voice tracks, precise interview transcripts and researcher's notes from the interviews), coding and memos from each method of data collection.

3.10 Data Analysis

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) outlined qualitative data analysis as generally explaining and making sense of the data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, regularities and categories, so there is, therefore, no single way to analyse and display qualitative data.

This exploratory study is associated fundamentally with human interaction and their interpretations to their own world and experience. However, since the field of Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) covers "purposeful human activity", it has therefore been used as an approach for data analysis (framework of data analysis). However, this research is not focusing upon action, but on learning and contributions to knowledge. Therefore, the last stage of the SSM approach, which is the action and changes to the studied situation (proposed by Checkland (1981)), will be used only to outline the recommendations for the studied cases.

An overview of the analytical steps taken in this study is explained below and the rationale for each decision is clarified as well. Specific examples of these steps and processes are provided. The main analytical procedures used in this study were:

- Soft system methodology framework
- Thematic analysis as an approach to apply SSM
- Coding
 - Line-by-line coding, in-vivo codes, focused coding, selective coding

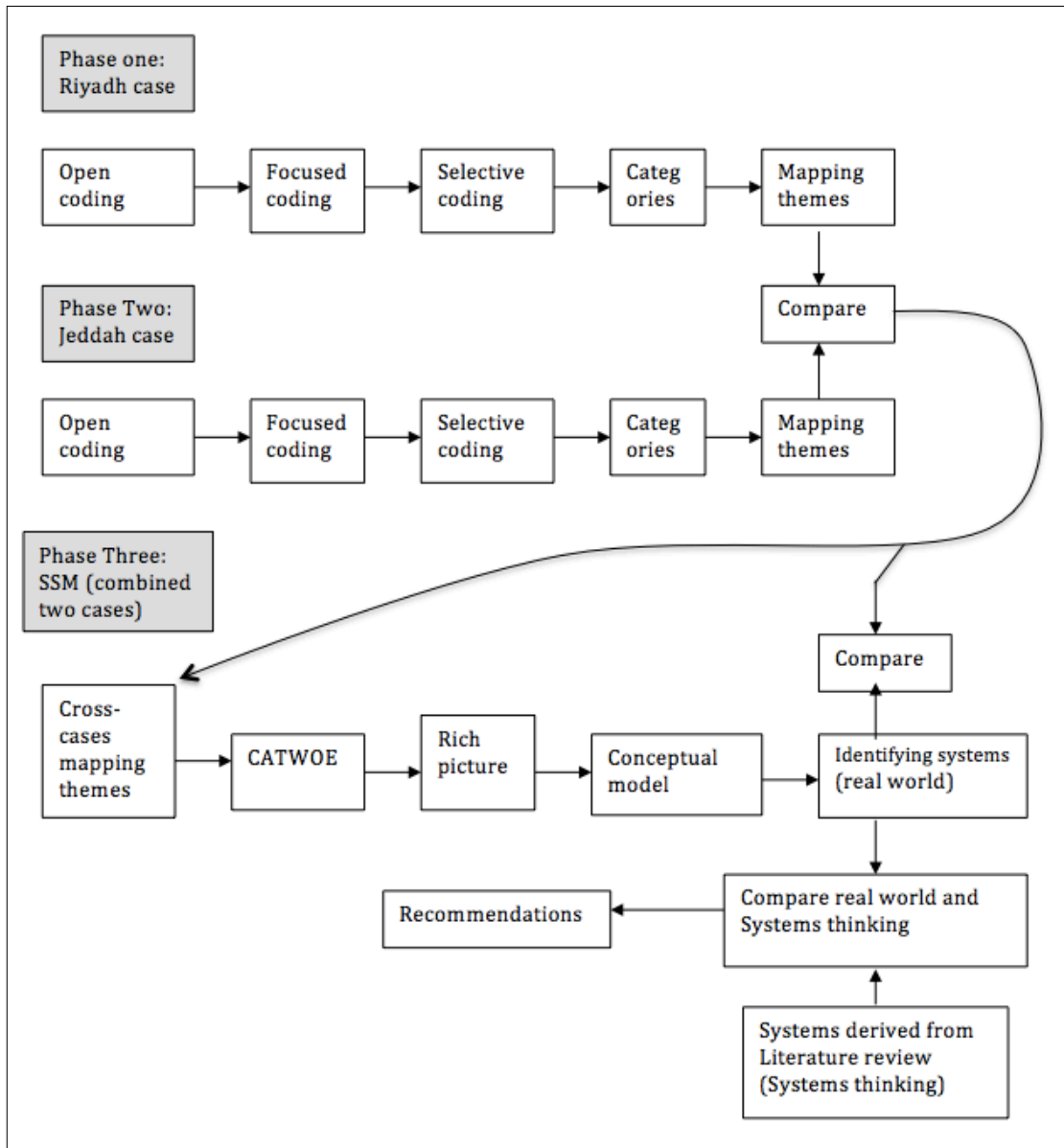


Figure 3.2: Analyses steps

3.10.1 Using soft system methodology as an analysis framework

Soft System Methodology (SSM) is a qualitative approach that can be used to apply systems thinking to non-systemic situations (Checkland, 1981). This technique of

dealing with a problem situation is associated with situations where there is human activity, and a political and high social component (Checkland & Scholes, 1990).

Soft Systems Methodology attempts to adopt learning and appreciation of the problem situation between stakeholders, instead of setting out to solve a pre-defined problem (Eden and Radford, 1990). The complexity of a social problem situation reverses attempts at defining a problem: in such situations SSM provides a framework for tackling and explaining such situations.

Peter Checkland originally established Soft Systems Methodology to deal with and evaluate large and complex organizational problems, unlike what he used to work with: “Hard” systems thinking, which is associated with problems which are more technology-oriented (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). He found that “Hard” systems methodology was insufficient for dealing with extremely complex problems that had a considerable social concept. His application of SSM was successful and useful throughout a number of research projects in industry and was refined over many years. However, this methodology was first published in 1981.

Checkland variously characterized SSM as an ‘enquiry process’, a ‘system of enquiry’, ‘reflection in action’, ‘learning system’, ‘structured way of thinking’ and ‘an organized version of doing purposeful thinking’ (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). Its purpose is to ‘articulate a debate about change’. Moreover, SSM produced successful models as it involves the necessary negotiation of meanings between participants, as they are essential to the research (Rose, 1997).

There are two methods within SSM: real world activities and systems thinking about the real world. Primary work includes meetings and interviews to gain an understanding of the problem situation that is embodied by the use of 'rich pictures'. Then, systems thinking uses concepts of order, control, communication and emergent possessions to detect 'relevant systems' which may provide useful insights, which are real world activities.

Relevant systems are defined by forming 'root definitions', and then used to generate 'conceptual models' of the selected systems. These conceptual models, demonstrating

different viewpoints, are then used as the foundation of a debate that through an 'appreciative process' can lead to feasible and desirable change and then to action, (Checkland, 1999) which is not the scope of this research. Therefore, the action phase of SSM has not been used in this research, but only served to help outline the recommendations of this research.

Consequently, for this PhD study, SSM was found to be useful to understand the complexity and the dynamic of students' learning experience. In addition, it helped me to build a better understanding of the situation and to conduct deeper analysis to unfold the multilayers of students' journeys through their own learning experience.

The position of SSM in the data analysis framework of this research is to guide my understanding on female learning experience systematically. Female learning experience is the "real word" that is socially constructed and where 'participants continually negotiate and renegotiate with others, their perceptions and interpretations of the world outside themselves' (Checkland, 1999). Therefore, my role as an SSM analyst is also as a participant in the process to construct the real word understanding of this phenomenon, and then using the 'systems thinking' as the epistemological set of principles that allowed me to access a richer understanding, and therefore permitted me to recommend (richer, more insightful) perceptions of that domain (learning experience).

Figure 3.3 compares the original principles of applying SSM to a problem phenomenon for alteration, and my own implementation of the SSM approach to build a better understanding and to provide solid recommendations based on the literature available.

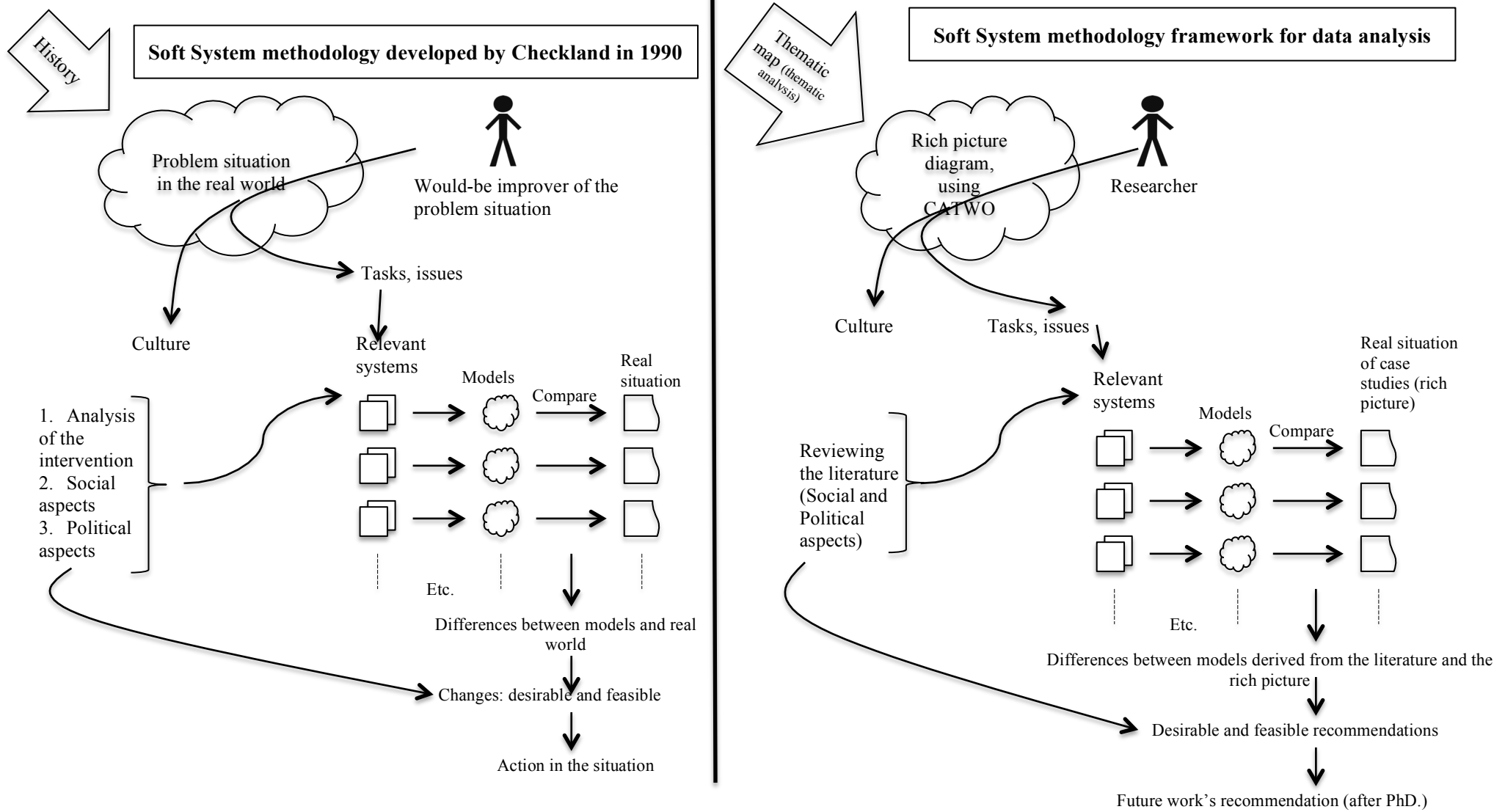


Fig. 3.3: SSM framework for data analysis influenced by Checkland approach

The following steps have been followed in this study analysis to implement SSM, see (Figure 3.3):

1. Exploring the phenomenon of this research (learning experience) by using: observation, questionnaires and interviews to collect data.
2. Reading the investigation (interviews) transcript of the phenomenon and adopting thematic analysis to draw thematic maps to increase the understanding of the phenomenon.
3. Expressing the problem situation through “rich picture” which is a means to capture as much information as possible, which is related to the situation. A rich picture shows structure, boundaries, communication channels and information flows. More precisely, it captures the human activity system. By using this means, the researcher can put many stakeholders’ variables, which influenced the whole learning experience, into one diagram.
4. Comparing Step 3 with Step 2 (both transcripts and thematic map) to make sure that the rich picture covers all issues.
5. Root definition of relevant systems, which is a written statement that elaborates a transformation. This statement kept reminding the researcher to think: “What is this model about?” It also helped the researcher to look at the same problem from different perspectives, which resulted in one complex diagram with 4 controlled systems for the overall learning experience. Therefore, six key elements have been identified to help the researcher make well-formulated root definitions. These six elements are summed up in the abbreviation **CATWOE**:
 - a. **C**: The beneficiaries of this process. Checkland used **C** to represent the customers of a system, but in this project it represents everyone benefitting from this learning context.
 - b. **A**: ‘Actors’: those who undertake the process of transforming the input to output. They perform the activities that defined the system.
 - c. **T**: ‘Transformation process’: the conversion of input to output.
 - d. **W**: ‘Weltanschauung’: the German expression of worldview which makes ‘T’ meaningful in context.
 - e. **O**: ‘Owners’: those who could stop ‘T’.
 - f. **E**: ‘Environmental constraints’: elements outside the system which are taken as given.

Figure 3.4 illustrates the use of root definition, CATWOE elements and main concept.

Root definition of (females' learning experience journey):

A Saudi female student attends the university's educational system to graduate and achieve Baccalaureate qualification, by creating her own personal study system, in keeping with the overall Saudi's cultural and religious beliefs, in order to score higher grades and to keep her overall GPA as high as she could to guarantee a suitable BSc certificate for future use.



C The beneficiaries of this process	Female students of university (KAUs and PNU)
A 'Actors': those who do this process	KAU's and PNU's female students, KAU's male students, KAU's and PNU's female tutors, KAU's and PNU's male tutors, KAU's and PNU's female staff, transportation male drivers.
T 'Transformation process': the conversion of input to output.	Undergraduate → Graduate students with higher marks
W 'Weltanschauung': the worldview which makes 'T' meaningful in context	Determine and precise students can achieve higher grades in their university's courses.
O 'Owners': those who could stop 'T'	KAU's and PNU's management, KAU's and PNU's Female students.
E 'Environmental constraints': elements outside the system which it takes as given	Saudi higher education system, females' family influences, cultural and religious beliefs.

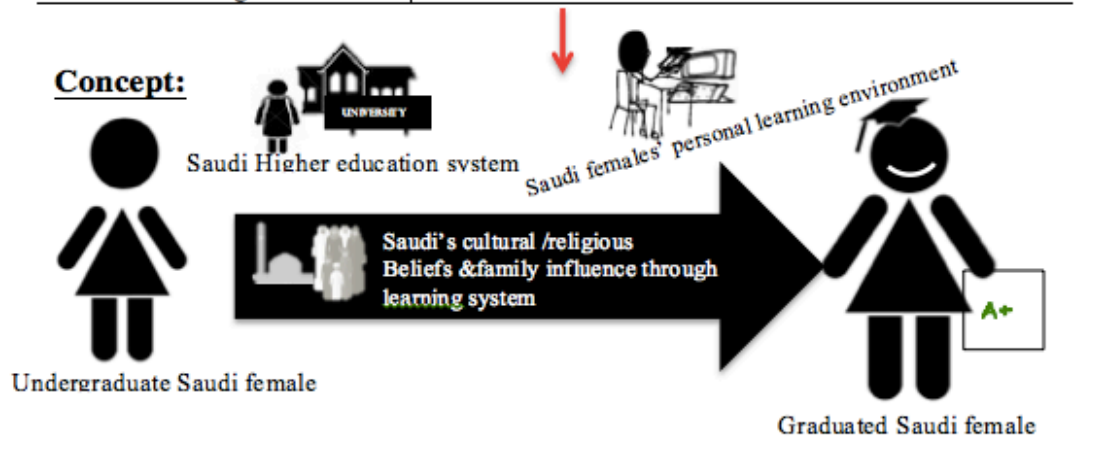


Fig. 3.4: Implementing Checkland's steps of SSM in this study to analyse rich data

4. Expanding each system (Chickland uses the term system, but in this study it is the main theme including sub-themes) for the better understanding of the relationship between systems (in this PhD: to build better understanding between themes).
5. Building conceptual models including system thinking. In this step I used the literature as my data source, to build the optimum learning experience model, based on up-to-date studies related to learning experiences, to reach a formal system concept.
6. Comparing step number 4 with step number 5 to identify the gap in knowledge and the unique contribution of this PhD project to the knowledge (discussion chapter).
7. Desirable and feasible changes recommended according to the comparison step number 8.

However, constant comparison between conceptual models, rich picture and previous thematic analysis has been conducted along with this SSM, to reveal the core of this project.

Consequently, the thematic analysis was used as a fundamental step to reach the SSM. Thematic analysis was the first step required to understand the raw data and to generate codes, issues and themes to reveal how Saudi Arabian students experience their learning journey (Loffe & Yardley, 2004). A thematic map was designed to clarify the main concepts of this learning experience, as it helped me to group data together and to look at this phenomenon horizontally. Moving between the raw data (the transcripts) and the higher level of conceptual data, provided me with the basis for a story telling of the data (Bryman, 2012).

Thematic analysis helped to initially build understanding and SSM helped to uncover the relationship between these themes and enabled the deeper understanding of the systems when all related together to produce a multi-layer understanding of the complex phenomenon.

3.10.2 Using thematic analysis as a tool

The value of qualitative description lies in the knowledge that can come from it. It can be used as a channel to present and treat research methods as living instruments that can result in establishing meaning and solid findings, and thereby resist simple classification (Giorgi, 1992; Holloway & Todres, 2005; Sandelowski, 2010).

Thematic analysis is a suitable method to answer questions such as: what are the concerns of people about an event? Why do people employ a service or procedure? Are they using it effectively or not? What are the core investigations of this research? (Ayres, 2007).

However, the main purpose of this research is an exploratory case study. Case studies are usually associated with descriptive analysis and that in turn will influence the method of the analysis write up (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

Thematic analysis has been conducted to analyse the research data. However, it does not often appear as a named method of analysis and is seen as a poorly branded method (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Thematic analysis can be defined as an independent qualitative, descriptive approach “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). It has also been introduced as a qualitative descriptive method that provides skills for researchers, enabling them to conduct many other forms of qualitative analysis. In addition, thematic analysis is a flexible and useful research tool, providing a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of the data when conducting exploratory work in an area where not much is known (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis differs from other analytic methods that are used to describe patterns across qualitative data, such as thematic decomposition analysis, thematic discourse analysis and grounded theory. Grounded theory seeks patterns in the data, but is theoretically bounded, which is not in this PhD study.

Early analysis of data indicated issues that needed exploration, hence the number of questions for the interviews was increased and guided by the on-going progressive focus on/selection of key issues for further investigation. In addition, early analysis helped the researcher to avoid data overload (Huderman, 1984). Both questionnaires and observational data helped the researcher to gain an overview of the situation,

before conducting the students' interviews, resulting in 'thick transcription' data that described events in context, and participants' agency, intentions and relationships. (Greetz, 1973). However, by using thematic analysis the core aim was to apply minimal description to data sets, and to interpret various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to construct a world in which the texts made sense, thereby permitting the researcher to answer the research questions effectively (Krippendorff, 2004).

For these reasons the development and identification of variables do not take place prior to data collection but instead as part of the data collection process. Data has been collected until no new or relevant data emerges regarding category, or relationships between categories are established anymore in the last two interviews (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Interview questions gave as little guidance as possible to allow the interviewees to talk about what is important to them with regards to the context. The researcher then needed to extract those phenomena or experiences significant to the interviewee by assigning a conceptual label, known as a code. Several codes have been grouped into more abstract categories which eventually formed the basis for the development of the thematic diagram (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

3.10.2.1 Coding

Coding is the bridge between collecting data and developing emerging themes to explain the participants' experience (Figure 3.4). A code is a name or label that the researcher gives to a text that contains pieces of information or a specific idea (Gibbs, 2007). Through coding the researcher reads the data transcripts to see what is happening and to interpret meaning (Charmaz, 2006). Flick (2009, p.310) identified that initial coding asks fundamental questions such as: 'who', 'why', 'what', 'where', 'how', 'when', 'how long', 'how much', 'how strong', 'what for' and 'by which?'. Initial codes are outlined, taken from the participant's words and help the researcher to mark their motives and personal issues into data. Line by line coding gives details of people, actions and their settings. By looking for assumptions, actions and events, changes in thinking, and using the participant's own language, the codes identified help to identify significant meanings (Charmaz, 2006). In qualitative research, these codes may be common terms, which have a widely accepted meaning, new terms

generated by the participants, or terms that reflect the ideas of a particular group.

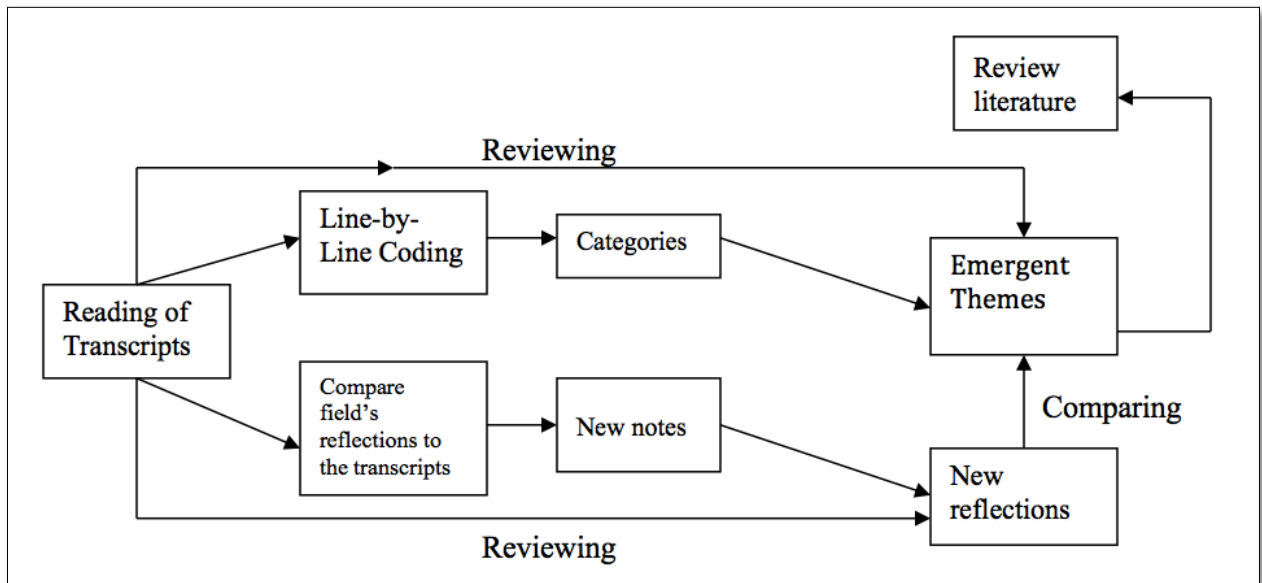


Figure 3.5: The Processes Involved in Reading Transcripts, Coding, Identifying Categories and Themes.

Describing the ways in which data were collected and analyzed in this study was not an easy endeavor. As Glaser (1978), Strauss and Corbin (1998), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Creswell (2013 & 2009) and Silverman (2013) all stressed that analysis in qualitative study is a dynamic and fluid process that involves going back and forth from one level of analysis to the other, from interviews to coding and from coding to interviews, and from the real world data to literature. The coding process of this research analytic task consisted of the following phases: (1) open coding, close reading of data to generate codes and categories; and (2) selective coding, identifying the core category.

6.10.2.1.A Open Coding

The first phase of the analytical process is open coding, which generates categories and defines their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It involves the close reading of data, line-by-line, phase-by-phase and a sentence-by-sentence coding basis. The aim of line-by-line reading of interview transcripts is to generate codes, names, or categories that account for the data under analysis. Close reading of the data opens up the text, revealing the thoughts, ideas and meanings contained therein

(Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding is the first step towards development of the categories because it generates concepts, the foundation for building the core theme (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

As I read the data, I identified words, sentences, or an entire paragraph that delivered particular ideas or meanings and placed codes or names that best represented the conceptual meanings. I did this manually during careful reading of each transcript. The process was done four or five times for each transcript on different days to ensure a full list of extractions. Codes generated in the early stage of the research were regarded as cautious.

I identified some problems with the coding. I felt that I may have imposed my ideas and preconceptions on to the data making the coding too general, rather than using participant's words, and identifying topics rather than action and process (Charmaz, 2006). This made me aware that I may have interpreted the first participant's words rather than using their words and ideas. As a result, the transcript was re-read and re-coded using the participant's own words. This process demonstrated how important it was to focus on the content.

The flow of thinking and analysis moved between the early codes, the interview transcripts and the research question (Figure 2). Unexpected ideas emerged as codes are compared, and as field notes were read (Charmaz, 2006).

A number of codes or themes kept re-emerging and became the major themes of the study. The codes placed on thematic units occurred from participants' words, known as *in vivo* codes (one that drives from the natural language of participants in the social context being studied (Strauss, 1987)), for example, the codes "student-tutor communication gap," "using social media," "Family and Education", "Time Flexibility", 'Studying for Exam', 'socializing', 'Interest', 'Seeking linkage to the real-life-cases' and 'Emotional support.' Other codes came from the meaning the units of data suggested when examined comparatively and in context (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). For instance, the following codes were created to reflect the meanings contained in the participants' words: "Welcoming expectation," "Desire for direct, supportive and effective relationships with tutors," "Students under estimating Tutors' ability to perform their duties," and "Expectations of lecturing and/or assessments".

When codes began to gather, I started to group related codes that shared some common characteristics under one category. Open coding produced categories, such as the following: “lectures,” “university contact” and “studying strategies”. Certain categories counted several codes and descriptions. For example, the category studying strategies included the following codes and properties: - memorizing, deep reading of books, rely on lecture slides and notes, practicing on previous exams and studying with friends.

The generated categories were important because it not only eased reading and analyzing data but also helped in terms of thinking conceptually about the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

After categories capturing emerging themes had been identified, the researcher compared categories across cases to identify themes that were held in common among participants.

6.10.2.1.B Selective Coding

Selective coding is the process of identifying the core category or phenomenon around which all the other categories identified are integrated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This will be used to link information between and across categories to form a bigger category.

Themes emerge from data as participants’ coded ideas are grouped into categories: categories are refined and described. Themes are the result of repeat evaluation of categories, codes and data. Braun & Clarke (2007) described this as the process of data-driven sorting, diagramming and integrating. Data-driven sorting is the comparison of categories at an abstract level as a way to understand and organize the ideas or significant events. Diagramming is the visual representation of categories, and of the themes and relationships between them. To help ensure that the themes are derived from the participant’s understanding of their experiences, the researcher referred back to the transcripts (Charmaz, 2006).

3.10.2.2 Phases of thematic analysis

Table 3.2: Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 87)

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarisation with data:	Transcribing data, reading and re- reading the data, noting down initial ideas (Open Coding).
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code (Selective Coding).
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic “map” of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final occasion for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Research Methods

3.11 Research Focus

This study was based on my interest in the female learning experience in Higher Education in the Saudi Arabian public university setting. This study was limited to the female undergraduate students who enrolled at Business School, as the researcher would gain easier access to two Business Schools because of her sponsorship.

This research concentrated on the student's ideas, tutors and staff in the Business School of Princess Nourah University in Riyadh, and the Business School of King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, both within the women's division.

The overall aim of this study was: to explore the nature of the female learning experience in a Saudi Arabian public university setting. This learning experience encompasses the learning environments, goals for higher education, attitudes and personal reflections of the students' learning journey in Saudi Arabia so far.

In order to gain approval for the research, ethical approval for the study was obtained first from the Business School Research Ethics Committee, at the University of Brighton, in the UK, and then from the two institutions that represent the case studies: Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University's Review Board in Riyadh, in which the first case study was conducted, and from King Abdulaziz University's Review Board in Jeddah (Appendix 2 and 3). However, multiple methods were used within the case study as data collection instruments (for triangulation purposes): observation, questionnaire, interview, and varied resources: namely, undergraduate female students, tutors (male and female), female administrators, female technicians and supervisors; to highlight or invalidate some extraneous influences (see Figure 3.5).

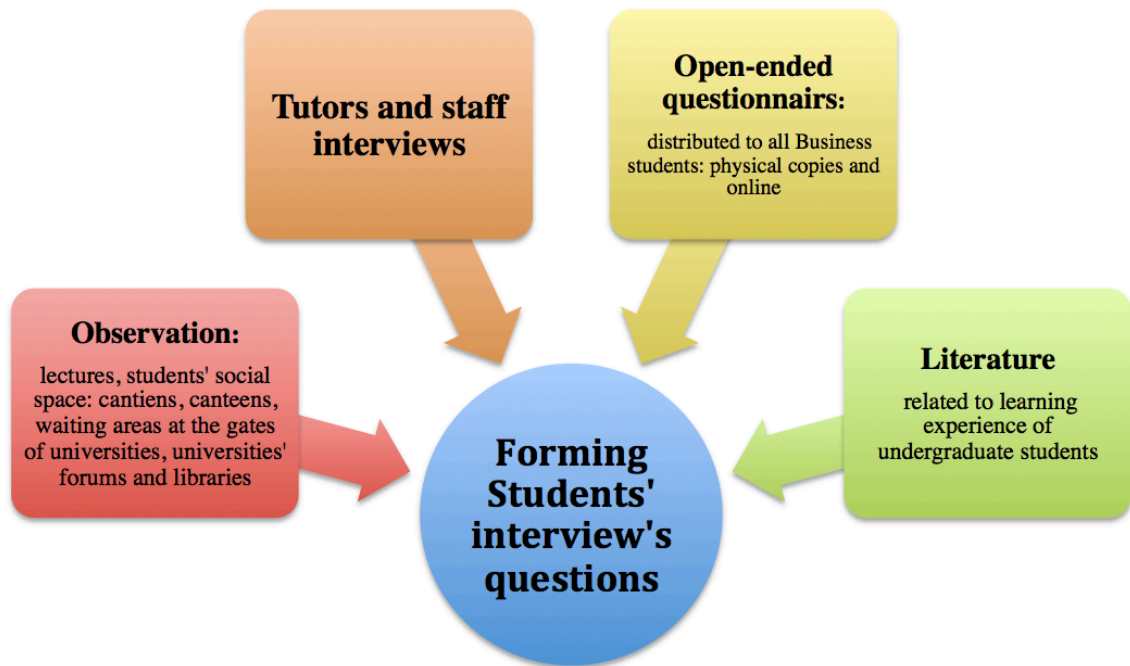


Fig.3.6: Mixed methods used as a first step to form the main instrument of data collection for each Case Study

These multiple methods helped me to form my questions for interviewing students. As this PhD is about exploring a new area in the Saudi learning experience, which is the female undergraduate students' learning experiences at public universities, without prior qualitative studies established in such an area (evidenced in Chapter 2: point 2.7), I had to build my own questions for the interviews, considering cultural and religious beliefs with respect to Saudi norms, by using the help of reading general literature related to learning experiences. Then I had to distribute open-ended questionnaires online and physically to all students of Business schools in both universities that I planned to collect the data from. While waiting for the questionnaire responses, I conducted an observation approach to grasp issues and notes about students learning journeys in class and students' social spaces, such as canteens, waiting areas at the gates of universities, university forums and libraries. Afterwards, with both feeds (questionnaires data and observations notes), I conducted an initial thematic analysis to extract themes and issues that I needed to investigate in depth with female students during the interviews. However, some emergent themes were new to my literature knowledge and so I had to go back to read more about them to cover these areas. In addition, I interviewed university members (8 female tutors, 6

male tutors, and 3 technical support members in total from both universities). Finally, I gathered all the information I could and was ready to collect the data.

During the data collection period, I faced some new subjects that I had not covered in the earlier stages. Therefore, I had to reach to the literature again for more reading and understanding, equipped with notes and symbols to remind myself of these issues. I then continued my interviews as shown in Figure 3.7.

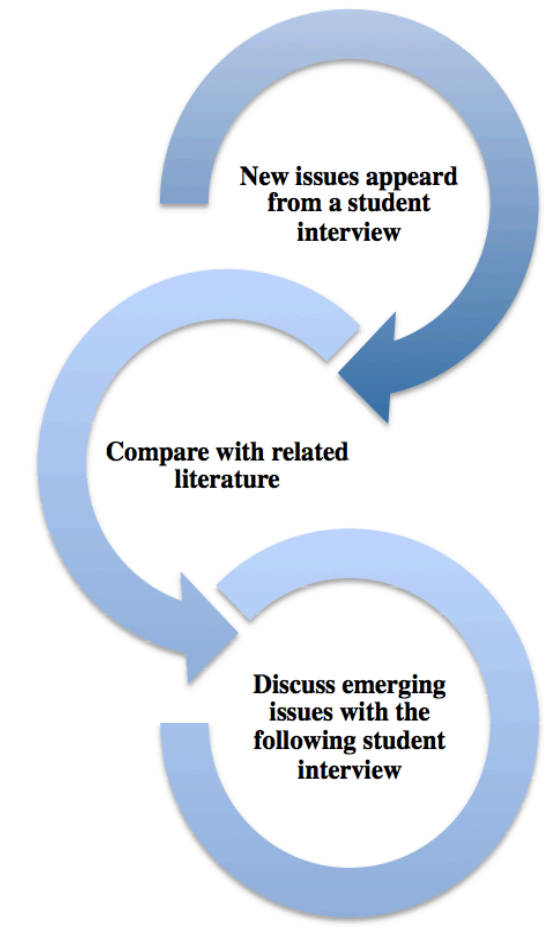


Fig.3.7: Second step of forming the main instrument of data collection for each Case Study

The following part will explain in detail each tool that I have used in my data collection.

6.12 Observations

Observation is more than just looking; it is looking (usually systematically) and noting systematically events, people, settings, behaviours, routines, artifacts and so on (Simpson and Tuson, 2003). Observation as a research method offers the investigator the opportunity to gather live data from natural social situations; as by using this method a researcher can look at what is taking place *in situ* rather than relying on second-hand accounts (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Cohen and his colleagues also suggested that gathering data through the observation method has a unique strength by producing more valid or authentic data than mediated or inferential methods. Moreover, observation provides a reality check, as what people do may differ from what they say they do (Robson, 2002) and on a procedural point, some participants may prefer the presence of an observer to an intrusive, time consuming questionnaire or interview (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, this method of data collection was used to investigate and explore the learning experience of female students in different physical environments, such as: technologies in the classrooms, library, computer facilities (inside/outside classrooms), university forums, university classes (e.g. face-to-face lecture, video-conferencing and CCTV-based lectures, etc.) and the university's hall. Thus, conducting observation helped the researcher to be open-ended and employ an inductive method, to see student and tutor behaviour in and out of classes that might otherwise be unconsciously missed, and to discover things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations (Moyles, 2002).

However, observation is a highly flexible form of data collection that can also be used to complement other kinds of data (Simpson and Tuson, 2003), therefore, it has been used in this study to complement questionnaires and fed to interviews axis and subjects to record student and tutor reaction to certain observed behaviours or issues, attitudes to the learning environment and their reflection on the learning experience.

On the other hand, the lack of control in observing in natural settings may reduce observation and might make it less useful, coupled with difficulties in measurement, difficulties in gaining access and negotiating entry, and difficulties in maintaining anonymity (Bailey, 1994). However, Patton (1990) argued that observational data should enable the researcher to understand and enter into the situation which is being

described; and that it lays on the continuum from unstructured to structured, responsive to pre-ordinate.

Therefore, to conduct this study and to limit these disadvantages of observation, semi-structured checklists have been implemented (Appendix 7), as *semi-structured observation* will have an agenda of issues but will gather data to focus on these issues in a far less systematic or predetermined manner, and will be hypotheses-generating rather than testing the hypotheses, unlike structured observation that will already have its hypotheses decided and will test them by observational data to confirm or refute these hypotheses (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). In addition, semi-structured observation reviews observational data before suggesting an explanation for the phenomena being observed (Patton, 1990). Therefore, for this study, the author used observational technique before the interviews to write the noted issues and to discuss them with the participants being interviewed.

As my role as a researcher using the observation method, I conducted the *complete observer* role (only observing) overtly and detached from the group and took (with approval from the Dean of the Business School and each tutor) video recording and photographs at the same time as writing notes and reflection. The reason for obtaining consent from the Dean of the Business School is that the Saudi Arabian culture is a hierarchical one (Al-Saggaf and Weckert, 2004) and one cannot obtain just the tutor's consent without first obtaining the Dean's. However, lecture settings in Saudi Arabia usually consist of between 40-100 students (Al Lily, 2012), and obtaining student consent would be insufficient, particularly as the data will be focusing on the dynamic of the whole classroom rather than tracking individual activity. However, the researcher asked the lecturer to inform the students verbally that a research observation would be taking place during their lecture.

3.12.1 Sampling

In the Business School of Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University there are 5 major fields of study: Accounting, Economics, Business Administration, Law and Dublin City University's Programme. Therefore, I had to inform each Head of Department about the observation procedure, and they provided me with the timetable

for each tutor (who gave approval for the observation method to be conducted in their lectures). I chose from each department one face-to-face lecture and one CCTV lecture (as one female lecturer and another male lecturer). In total I observed 9 lectures: as no female tutor from the Law Division had replied with approval to the Head of the Law Department, and there was only a male tutor from the Law Department who gave approval for his lecture to be observed. These 9 lectures were varied in times and dates (stretching from 8.30 am to 3.30 pm).

For the library observation, the Dean of the Business School had sent an explanation to the library, so when I went there the manager of the library helped me and gave me a tour. However, for the campus observation, I placed printed announcements (after gaining approval from the Dean of the Business School) on the entrance of the Business Campus stating that an observation was in process, and emails were sent by the Business School Administration to students to inform them about the observation process.

For the students' accounts and forum, I had to ask each interviewed student (at the end of each interview as an optional task) if they would show me their accounts to be observed. Only two students agreed.

However, Adler and Adler (1994) stated that when the situations that are being observed appear to be repeating data that has already been collected, the researcher may stop the observation. However, I stopped observing because of the limited number of approved tutors.

The *Emic* approach has been used initially to analyse the observational data, as the use of this observational data was to extract issues, to build initial understanding of the situation and then to influence the questions of the next step of interviewing students. As it uses the conceptual frameworks of those being researched where the definition of the situations are captured through the eyes of the observed (Silverman, 1993).

3.13 Semi-structured interviews:

Semi-structured audio-tape was the main method of data collection in this study through one-to-one interviews. Interviews were conducted over a two-month period in each case (from February to April, 2014 and from December 2014 to February 2015). Through interviews, I intended to gain in-depth understanding of participant world views, and open-ended questions related to student learning experience were posed for both female students and staff (including tutors).

Interviews were based on questions derived from the study research question, which are interview questions posed for students' learning experiences in order to evaluate the influence of their expectations, attitudes, perceptions and emotions. Therefore, a consistent set of study questions was created and adjusted as necessary in order to capture in-depth feedback from participants (See Table 3.3 & 3.4).

Main questions for students

Table 3.3: The following types of questions were asked:

Interview Guide
1. Tell me the story about you joining this university? Why?
2. How do you learn in higher education? Please explain your methods of learning and studying?
3. How would you reflect generally about your personal learning journey so far in Saudi Arabian higher education?

Main questions for university staff

Table 3.4: The following types of questions were asked:

1. Tell me why you think these students have joined this university?
2. Explain how you teach in university? Please reflect on your teaching experience
Or:
2. Explain how your work affects students? Please reflect on your working experience with students.

3. How would you reflect generally about the learning experience in Saudi Arabian higher education?

For further information and to evaluate the context of the interview, basic demographic questions were applied: these included marital status and age for participants, level of education and years of experience for staff (Appendix 8 and 9).

The semi-structured interview method was chosen because it was considered flexible enough for participants to explain in-depth, and also to cover the range of topics that were the broad focus of the study (Bryman, 2011).

The researcher has followed the principles of interviewing as suggested by Bryman (1999): the participants' comfort level should be assigned a higher priority than the data; what is being said has to be listened to closely and one should pay attention as to when to probe; understand the experience from the participants' own views and validate its significance; finally, close the interview on a positive level.

All student interviews were held in private, in an office placed away from the classrooms (in a staff office which had been given to the Researcher especially to conduct her research) at a time that was mutually agreed by the Researcher and the participant. Before each interview I asked if the participant had read the participant information sheet (Appendix 5) and ensured that the participant fully understood the nature of the research. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions, which would give them further information. I made clear statements regarding the demands on the participant's time and about the general direction of the research. For instance, before the interview was initiated, I established that the interviews would last for between 30-45 minutes, unless the participant wished the interview to be longer or shorter.

The participants were informed that they were absolutely free to withdraw from the research process at any time and had the right to stop the recording at any point. They were informed that their confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained throughout by the use of pseudonyms. The participants were also offered the opportunity to read a summary of their interview. However, none of the students took

up this offer. Moreover, each participant signed a consent form before conducting the interview (Appendix 6).

For the staff interview, I went to their offices at a time that was mutually agreed by the researcher and the participants. However, for the male tutors who agreed to participate (4 tutors), the interviews were conducted using the Skype software application, as the Saudi regulations of universities do not allow mixed gender meetings. Moreover, I made sure that my camera was open so that the participants could see me, and only 2 of them opened their camera so I could see them to record their reaction (Appendix 10). However, one of the male tutors did not have an account on Skype and suggested to conduct the interview through his office telephone (landline) so I called him. The two voice recorders were operated during these interviews (during Skype and telephone call) as they were all on speaker mode, and participants had indeed agreed to this.

The use of electronic media enabled me to reach the male tutors and to record their own point of view regarding students' learning experiences, and to overcome constraints such as location and availability of male participants to meet face-to-face (James, 2007; James and Busher, 2007).

Following each interview, I wrote notes, include descriptions of the context of the interview and my initial impression about themes that emerged during the interview. Finally, refreshments were made available during the interview for the participants, to help put them at ease.

3.13.1 Sampling

In qualitative research sample selection is different compared to that undertaken in quantitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In quantitative research, random sampling is used to ensure generalization, however, qualitative research is more concerned with selecting a sample which best represents the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation. In addition, qualitative research sampling helps the researcher to find data needed to address his or her research questions (Mason, 2002).

In this qualitative research a volunteer-base sampling was conducted as the main method for data collection (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011), as the main aim of this PhD study is exploring new knowledge in Saudi Arabia and the researcher did not look for generalizability, and consequently, the data gathered are not representative of all people, merely of those that choose to volunteer. Volunteer sampling is one of the main types of non-probability sampling methods, which does not represent the wider population (*ibid.*, 2011). Often, these volunteering participants have a strong interest in the main topic of the study and have rich data to offer.

For both case studies, this sampling method was used with students; because of time constrain and limited access time to students' interaction.

However, for the staff and tutors' sampling method for interviewing, a convenience sampling was used. As the main reasons for staff and tutors' participation were to deepen and shaping the questions of students' interviews. Therefore, by the time of questionnaires that have been distributed online for respondents, and after couple of students' interviews, the researcher chose staff/ tutors/ administrators who happened to be available and accessible at that time. This method of sampling is sometimes called opportunity sampling (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

3.13.2 Participants

All student participants were undergraduate females, who were based within Saudi Arabia, and were enrolled in Business School. For the staff, they were all based within Saudi Arabia and working at the studied universities and had maintained a minimum of a year working experience in Saudi Arabian universities. These included staff that spoke Arabic and/or English.

3.13.3 Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria for students:

Undergraduate female students should be enrolled at the Business Faculty and have attended at least one month of business lectures.

Exclusion criteria for students:

Female students who have not specialized within the Business Faculty and were enrolled as part-time students.

Inclusion criteria for staff, tutors and administrators:

Qualified staff with a minimum one year of working experience in Saudi Arabian universities and who speak Arabic and/or English.

Exclusion criteria for staff, tutors and administrators:

Staffs who work outside the Business Faculty or newly recruited.

3.14 Questionnaires with open-ended questions:

Questionnaires were used to extract as much information as I could, and to reach students who did not have much free time to participate in the interview. Therefore, the interview questions were printed in the questionnaires and distributed to all Business undergraduate students (Appendix 11). This method granted Saudi Arabian females privacy: with regard to place, name, voice and face. It enabled female students to remain anonymous, as in Saudi Arabian society, both men and women are known for their shyness (Al-Saggaf, 2004). Also, individuals in Saudi Arabia, as Al Qathami (2005) believes, tend to avoid expressing their views publicly, especially when it comes to the country's cultural and societal systems, as well as religious subjects. Thus, this study is mainly about students' learning experience and discusses factors which would impact on this learning experience. Some questions were about the cultural effect and the gender segregation issue that can be experienced in the CCTV lectures. So, to explore and understand students' views about these matters (which could be sensitive for some students) the researcher printed the questions and tried to find answers that could be different from those of interviewees generally.

However, the basic demographic questions posed, included marital status and the participant's age, educational level, major field of study, experience of travel and study abroad, parental qualifications and family income.

The link to the questionnaires was included in the invitation letters which were sent to all Business students by email, and students were given the choice as to whether they wanted to follow the link to answer the questionnaire or to write their answers on hard copies. Questionnaires were placed online using the Qualtrics website.

3.14.1 Recruitment of Participants

For both students' interviews and questionnaires, the researcher sent the invitation letters and the participant information sheet (both electronically and as hard copies) to every Manager within each department of the Business Faculty (Head of Department), Appendix 4. Subsequently, each Head of Department distributed emails and hard copies to all faculty students via their tutors and via email. As a result, the response rate for the questionnaires was 258. However, for the interviews there were only 7 students (three from Jeddah and four from Riyadh), who contacted the researcher responding to such invitations. Therefore, the Author asked students, using announcements whether they were willing to participate, after each lecture that had been observed. Using this approach, the response rate rose to approximately 13 (six from Riyadh and seven from Jeddah). Finally, the Researcher arranged interview dates and times that were proposed by the students: interviewing 11 students. Four students did not show up for the interview.

Permission to carry out the research study was sought from the Dean of the Business Faculty and a copy of the research proposal was given to her.

However, the hard copy questionnaire responses were handed back to the Researcher directly by each Head of Department.

For female staff recruitment, most of the department managers gave the Researcher a list of all office numbers for all female staff in every department. Therefore, the Researcher had to physically go to their offices and invite them to participate in this study. For the male tutors it had to be arranged through each Head of Department who then gave me mobile numbers for those tutors that felt I should communicate with.

Any staff interested in participating in the study, were encouraged to call the Researcher even if they had questions or concerns regarding the study and their participation initially. Participants were requested to return the signed copy of the consent form and to provide their contact details directly to the Researcher or via the Researcher's email.

Finally, a thank you email was sent after participation.

A total of 17 female staff participated in the interview process.

3.14.2 Data Recording

The participant's own words or voice is an important part of gathering their understanding of experiences, therefore, 2 digital sound recorders were used as the preferred method to record the conversations during the one-to-one interviews, so that the interviewer could focus on the participant and the conversation, and have an accurate record of the intensive interview (Charmaz, 2006). In addition, I believed that the participants would feel more valued if the interviewer concentrated on listening to their conversations.

3.14.3 Transcription

An accurate word-for-word transcription of the interviews was implemented, and the use of the digital recorder also helped the Researcher maintain word accuracy with the original recording. Immediately after the interviews, I wrote notes and reflections, which helped during analysis and transcription. Audio-recorded interviews in the Arabic language were transcribed first in Arabic. The data within the transcribed interviews was checked against the audiotape to insure accuracy. Two of the transcriptions were in English because of the interviewee preferable language.

3.14.4 Translation

The researcher translated the interview schedule, consent form and participant information into Arabic. The interview questions and the questionnaires were translated into Arabic and then translated back into English by an independent person - blind to the original English form - to validate translation. However, the transcripts

of the interviews remained in Arabic to ensure accurate analysis as some of the interviewees used some Arabic slang language (common sayings) that could lose their intended meaning if they were literally translated to English. Nevertheless, line by line analysing to generate codes were conducted by using Arabic codes. Then grouping these codes to create subthemes, and main themes: English terminology was used to make it easier for researcher to go back and forth when comparing results to the literature.

3.14.5 Data Management and Storage

My primary goal, as a researcher, was to protect the identity of each participant and to maintain confidentiality throughout the research process. Sources of data collection including demographic information, contact details, signed consent forms, interview recordings, written transcripts and their translations, and the interview notes were all stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. Electronic data were protected via password files in the Researcher's personal computer. However, anonymity of the participants was kept by replacing participants' names with fake names, and only the researcher knew the participants' original names. All data will be destroyed once the research has been completed and publication has taken place.

3.15 Ethical Issues:

Table 3.5: Ethical issues and responses

No.	Ethics issues	Responses
1	Recruiting participants (the method)	Participation in the study was based on informed consent, and on a voluntary basis, with rights of withdrawal at any time.
2	Participants' identities in the interviews	Have been confidential and gave each participant the freedom to choose whatever names they want to be called in this research. They had the opportunity to choose whether to be named using their own names or to choose a different one to assure anonymity. Naming participants made it easier for the researcher to go back to individuals if necessary, and easier for arranging the data.
3	Dean of Business	It is likely that the key people in the two universities could be identified through their interviews.

	School Identity.	transcription, even though their names have been changed or hidden. Anonymity has been well explained to them and the researcher stressed how she cannot assure anonymity to key position participants, even if the university's name has been changed in this research. They have been given the chance to continue the interview or to withdraw from it. However, the aim of interviewing key people of these universities was to shape and develop the questions of the students' interviews. Therefore, when those key people knew about the aim of their interviews they felt confident to participate as no quote from their interviews would be used in this PhD.
4	The collected data	Data, once given to the researcher, are hers, and she may not use them in any way that publicly identifies the universities. Hence all data has been kept on the researcher's personal computer - locked by password - and has been backed up on the researcher's external hard disc: locked by a password. If there are any printable copies of the questionnaire, they will be kept in the researcher's own drawer, locked up with keys.
5	Data after submission of the Thesis	The data will be kept with the researcher for ten years in accordance with (Good Ethical Practice in Research). The data will be kept, hence, on the Researcher's personal computer locked by a password, and will be backed up on the researcher's external hard disc, locked by a password. If there are any printable copies of the questionnaire, these will be kept in the Researcher's own drawer, locked by a key. However, after 10 years, re-formatting both the computer and the external hard disc will be used to destroy the data. Also, hard copies of the data will be burned or shredded securely by the Researcher herself.
6	Interview data	The researcher used two recorders for the verbal interview data, for backup purposes. These audio clips have been downloaded to the researcher's personal laptop and locked by a password. However, whenever interviewees did not feel comfortable with voice recorders, the researcher may take written notes instead of recording (did not happen as all of the participants felt comfortable with the use of voice recording devices).
7	Translation quality	Conducting a pilot study before the actual data collection, to test the questionnaire. Taking notes from the pilot study's participants and redesigning the questions. However, the researcher translated the

		<p>questions herself and then test the translation with another academic researcher who speaks Arabic as a first language. The reason for translating both the questionnaires' and the interview's questions is to make sure that both versions of the questions are holding the same meaning in Arabic and in English, in case participants would be comfortable using one of those languages, to reach more in-depth data.</p>
8	Environmental observation	<p>It has been argued that taking photos of events will strengthen the observational data. However, Saudi Arabian culture is sensitive about taking photos, especially of females with uncovered heads. Due to this, the researcher took photos of empty classrooms and technologies used in any particular lecture. The classes have been informed about these photos, to ensure that everyone was aware of such a process after the class.</p> <p>In addition, the researcher has informed the Business School Administration about this tool for gathering data, and ascertained when the best time to take these photo. Also in accordance with the approval granted.</p>
9	Web-based university forum observation (privacy issues)	<p>The observation of the dynamics of the forums as a whole, rather than pursuing the activity of individuals. However, when there were any quotations from the forums, participants have not been identified as the quotations were translated into English and took off any names. This made it difficult to track these quotations on the research engines.</p> <p>However, in such a case, the researcher has sought permission from the forum administration to use some of the forum texts. Moreover, the researcher translated the text herself first, and then asked for consultation from the official translator, covering the source of such texts, and finally deleted any identities in the said text.</p>

Personal information including the name, phone number and address is confidential and is NOT to be shared with anyone. This information has been kept in the researcher's notebook and locked in her personal filing cabinet at her home. This information will be used only to re-contact any participant, should this be required. However, participation data has been kept "anonymous" in the researcher's report. Therefore, the analytical conclusion or results cannot be linked to any given participant's identity. If a person needs to follow up or provide additional information, a unique identifier, such as a number or fake name, has been given.

All efforts have been made by the researcher to ensure confidentiality, anonymity and ethical compliance. The participants have been given a voluntary informed choice sheet and declared therefore their understanding and their willingness to participate without any compulsion. Signing this sheet has been the participant's free choice (whether to sign it with their name, signature, or only by writing: "I have read and agreed to participant information and informed consent sheets").

Finally, the data has been analysed using thematic analysis method to reach common themes and to build up proposed theoretical framework. The researcher, after discussion with her supervisors, has done this analysis by herself, and she sought some advice relating to the use of such an analysis method, without declaring the identity of the participants' data.

3.16 Conclusion

The methodology for this study was developed using my understanding of what was required of me as a researcher and being aware of my theoretical positioning. The use of constructivist case study methodology allowed the research questions in this study to be answered using an approach that considers the prior assumptions that I had as well as the beliefs and biases that I naturally gathered throughout the course of my own experience. This subjectivity became strength within the research and reflexivity was used throughout the thesis so that the process was documented in an unbiased manner and therefore remained fully transparent.

The methods of data collection and the decisions, which the researcher had to make during this process, have been described. The techniques that were used for the development of the research questions and data collection were applied at the same time. This section has showed the process of data collection, and how transcribing was informed and guided by continuous comparison of the data. The next chapter presents the findings from the data thus far and the actual process of analysis.

Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the main factors of Saudi Arabian women's learning experience in higher education through a model demonstrating the main themes of data analysis. From that model, this chapter then proposes theoretical framework derived from these findings to explain such experience in Saudi Arabian universities. To ensure that the female's learning experience model is reflecting the data; a Soft System Methodology (SSM) approach has been followed according to Chickland steps (1990) (Chapter 3: root definition and C.A.T.W.O concept), then quotes have been used throughout as evidence from interview transcripts to present the findings.

To provide a context to the findings of this research, the background of the study participants can be found in Appendix 12, 13 and 14. Moreover, when using quotes from interview data: altered female names will appear by the end of quotes, and when excerpts are used from questionnaires, data metaphor will emerge by the end as S, which means a student, with a number that represents the order of that participant.

This chapter will start by presenting the background of the Saudi Arabian female learning experience in public universities, which is the rich picture resulting from following the SSM approach (Figure 4.1) to lay a foundation for the model of the Saudi Arabian female learning experience. The relationship between the rich picture and the model of Saudi Arabian women's learning experience will then be discussed. The substantive model of women's learning experience in public universities will be examined, focusing on the factors that form such experience, students' expectations from learning in higher education and their interaction with the learning process. This chapter will then be concluded by proposing the theoretical framework that explains the results of women's learning experience in Saudi Arabian public universities.

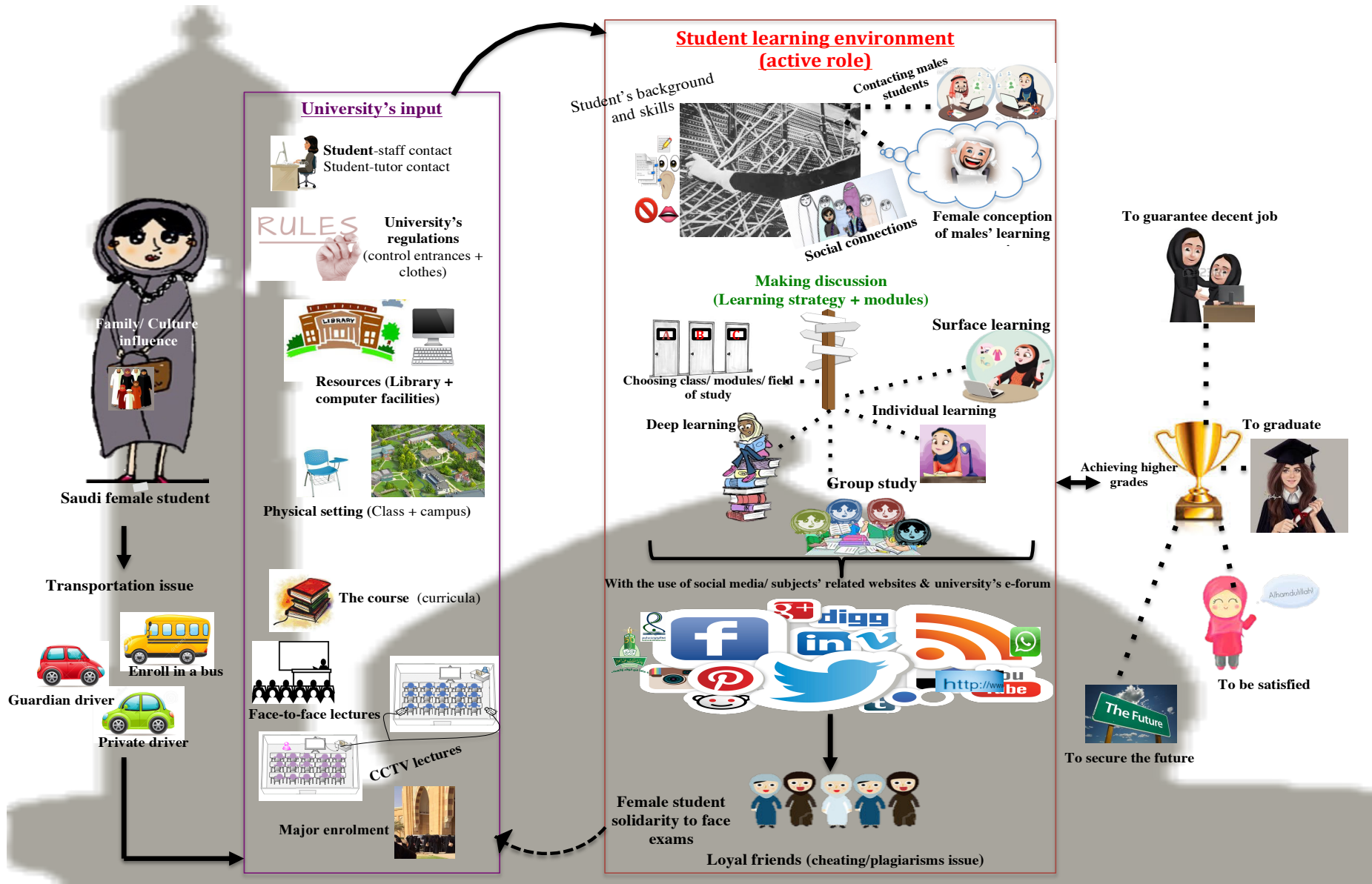


Figure 4.1 Rich picture diagram of Saudi women's learning experience journey

4.2 Learning experience Model

Saudi Arabian female students constructed a range of learning experience explanations. These rich descriptions of the learning experiences formed the “female learning journey rich picture” that emerged from students expressing their own individual learning journey. In addition, this diagram has been extracted from different ideas and beliefs that focused on students’ interactions, approaches and strategies to learn and study; and was based on their definition and understanding of the learning experience in higher education. As explained in Chapter 3, the learning experience rich picture helped the researcher to reconstruct themes from the views and beliefs of the students on the purpose, nature and tasks of the interaction between themselves as students, the university as provider, and their own learning environment and strategies. Thus, the model of female students’ learning experience in Saudi Arabia is not different compared to the rich picture, but rather an integrated version of the rich picture that has the same main themes, but which are located in a clear order of display (Figures 4.2 and 4.3).

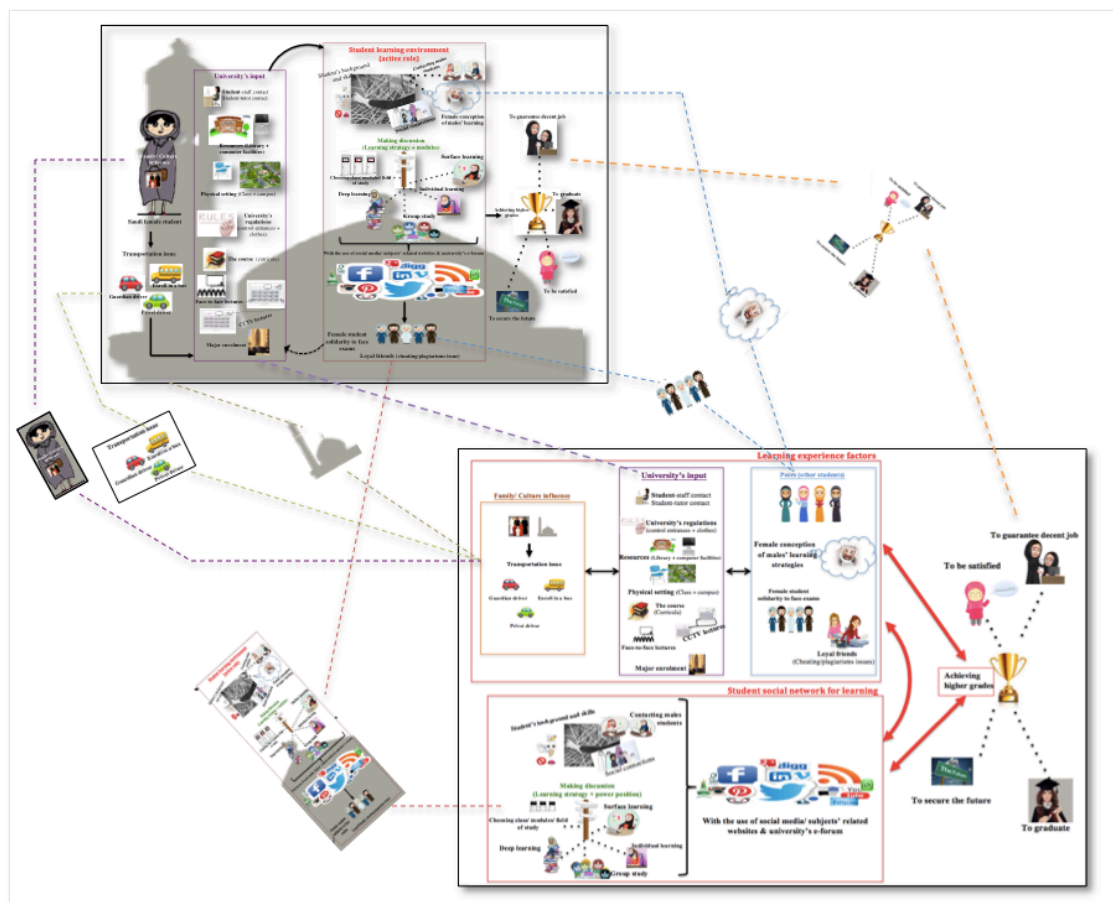


Figure 4.2 Extracting the model of Saudi women’s learning experience from rich picture

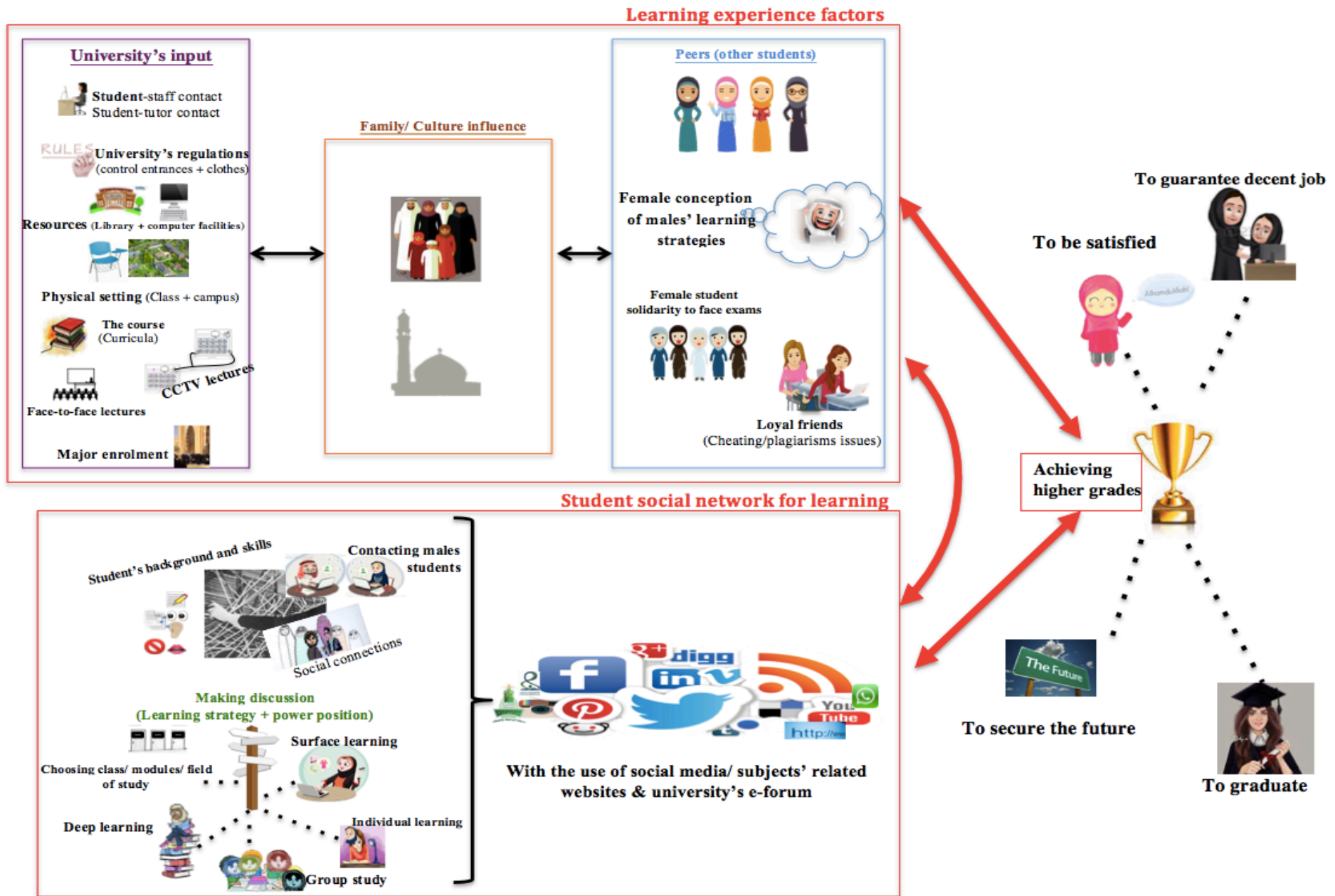


Figure 4.3 Model of Saudi women's learning experience in public universities

Figure 4.3 illustrates the Saudi Arabian women's learning experience journey that involves three main components:

- 1- Learning experience factors: where the experience starts to shape. This part is fundamental to the learning experience journey and without it there will be no learning experience.
- 2- Student's social networks for learning: where students react to what is happening in the parts of this learning journey (making decision regarding: learning strategies, classes, and joining a learning group or creating one).
- 3- The journey then leads to the final accreditation and goal of high grades in order to reach the students' personal goals beyond university.

More in-depth evidence will be discussed throughout the next part, where the female learning experience becomes embedded during and through this journey, and more explanation will illustrate how these components are connected.

4.2.1 Learning experience factors

In this section of the model of students' learning experience is the starting point of such experience in Saudi Arabian public universities, as without the physical and pedagogical settings of the universities, such an experience would not endure.

"University means learning ... it is where my experience happened."

Noor/ MIS

Also, without the influential roles of Saudi Arabian culture, religious beliefs and the existence of undergraduate peers, Saudi Arabian female students would not have that personal experience in higher education.

"It is not that simple, my learning choices and experience would be different, if I had another family name."

Najd/ BUS.

Therefore, this part of the learning experience is constructing the journey foundations, with female students holding the absent role, as most of the situations, sites and courses are fixed, and for the students these are facts which have to be accepted in order to start learning. Within this main element of the learning experience, there are three main sub-themes which explain the essential role of this part of the learning experience:

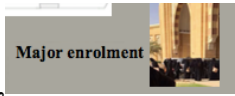
4.2.1.1 University's input

This is the platform of the university context: where the students have to directly interact with what the university provides and invests in the educational program, specifically in relation to course content, resources and lectures:

“When I think about learning experience many things come to mind: such as lectures, tutors, my subject course, my notes and my own study time.”

Muradi/Marketing

However, this phase starts when students are enrolled at their Business School (the

scope of this research), , nevertheless students found this major step difficult because of the filtration process that the university sets after the Foundation Year. The higher GPA score holders have more chance to choose which academic field they can enroll in. Sarah (MIS), for example, wanted to study Applied Science but because of her total GPA, she was only accepted at the Business School:

“Management of information systems was my second study choice.”

Sarah/MIS

A similar story presented with Dareen, who initially wanted to study in the Department of Pharmacy:

“Girls in my group were all very hard working, therefore the average GPA was 4.50 out of 5.”

Dareen/Accounting

On the other hand, Mashael (PAD) got accepted for her first choice, which was Public Administration:

“Because it offered a career future for me as a woman.”

Mashael/PAD

Subsequently, when students enrolled at Business School, their first task was to interact with their School by fixing and receiving the approved course schedule. Although students can arrange their schedule from home, using My KAU (Appendix 15) or ODUS, for example, the system sometimes would not display some of the modules due to technical errors. Therefore, students must physically travel to the

university in order to guarantee and finalize the arrangements for their preferred timetable. This experience has, nevertheless, already affected students' trust in their School's staff and management:

“We have always experienced a problem in adding and deleting modules... Of course, we have been suffering (particularly in our School) ... and ultimately no one member of staff is authorized to amend the timetable.”

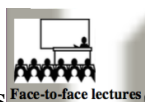
Sarah/MIS

Yet, when students responded in questionnaires about learning experience obstacles, only 52 students answered this question: 12 students (23.1%) considered the arrangement of their timetables as an obstacle to their learning experience since it could affect their attendance at lectures for months and, by extension, their understanding of their courses.

“The Wi-Fi signal is always weak, the University's website always has errors and fixing one's timetable is the worst task.”

S3/ Stated learning barriers

However, when the students approved their course schedule for the current semester, they start attending lectures accordingly. Lectures are the first introduction to the course requirements and materials. Students have two types of lectures: face-to-face and CCTV lectures.



In Face-to-face lectures

Students meet their tutors officially and learn about their subjects. However, the quality of teaching and lecturing is vital if meaningful information is to be delivered to the students. The quality of lectures is also related to clear vocal communication between students and their tutors in classes. Some students complain about the level of English of non-native speakers, as alongside the students' modest English language skills, they encounter difficulty in understanding varied accents as spoken by some tutors.

“It was so difficult to understand her ...She pronounced the letter “W” as a “V” sound...”

Dareen/Accounting

Students also stated that the interaction between them and their tutors is fundamental if they are to understand and fully engage with the academic subjects.

“Boring is the correct word to describe most of our lectures, because we ... only receive the information and write it down, ... This kind of routine, every day all day, makes us so uninterested in the subject.”

Mashaël/PAD

Mashaël also added that the issue of using technology during face-to-face lectures is not efficient in her opinion:

“The slides of some lectures are frequently unattractive, laterally: the same information, which is already in our books, is just copied to the slides: no photos, examples or videos there to make it easier to understand ... lectures which we can interact in are limited.”

Mashaël/PAD

However, Bashayer noted that an attractive lecture is dependent on the tutor's lecturing approach:

“It depends on the tutors themselves: some of them give us time to discuss and ask questions in order to understand everything. While others ... just avoid answering our queries and claim that we do not have enough time for discussion.”

Bashayer/HA

Therefore, students defined good lecturing according to the instructional ability of the tutors and the knack of transferring their expert skills to the students through lectures:

“The quality of teaching is totally dependent on the tutors themselves: some are over explaining the subject and give us examples ... while others only read the slides.”

Fatimah/PAD

“One tutor in ten has the ability to make us understand the subjects.”

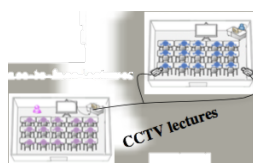
Sita/International Finance

“Our curricula are good but the teaching method needs to improve... as our syllabus

matches the American curricula, but the lecturing methods need to be developed and upgraded.”

Yosra /Finance

The issue of understanding the subjects has also been raised in CCTV lectures, as students do not only feel unengaged but also isolated and abandoned, when male tutors ask them to turn off their microphones.




“When the lecture is with a male tutor on CCTV, I usually do not pay attention ... especially when we have male students who are sitting face-to-face with this tutor... the male tutor will only interact with the boys, not with us... leaving us feeling as if we are not important to him ... he neither poses us any questions nor lets us ask any.”

Dareen/Accounting

Although 57.3% of students who gave their opinion on physical gender segregation in classes were agreeing with gender separation (51/89 students agreed with the importance of gender segregation during lectures for cultural and religious reasons), 41% of students (41/98 students) who gave their opinion regarding CCTV lectures, nevertheless considered CCTV lectures to be a difficult method of teaching and challenging to understand due to technical errors, connection faults and male tutors' biases.

Yet, some students find the course curricula to have an equal impact in rendering

some lectures unattractive  **The course (curricula)** :

“For the first two years the course was very enjoyable... but after that the curriculum began echoing itself and became repetitious ... and now it's boring.”

Haneen/PAD

“Honestly it is NOT good, because it focuses on the theoretical part only ... currently I'm thinking about what I should do when I go for my graduation placement? ... What should I do when I have to face the labour market?”

Ohood/Law

Other students find their curricula outdated, repetitive, and that they do not match their requirements as students.

“The curriculum of my field of study is repetitive, with many duplicate subjects...when we discussed this issue with our tutors they said that the curriculum will be developed in the near future.”

Fatemah/PAD

“Our curriculum is far from what we need to learn, as it does not relate to practice, and it does not link to the required job skills or our future career. I think they only gave it to us to increase the number of academic hours.”

Sarah/MIS

“In my field of study, General Administration, the first two years of studying our curriculum were very enjoyable... However, after that the curriculum approach became repetitious and boring. It kept talking about systems which ceased to exist... we are now just repeating our studies to obtain grades but not to acquire new knowledge.”

Atheer/Accounting

Conversely, other students suggest that the curriculum is not the problem: it is the English terminology that is difficult to understand. They also find the English level of their books to be much more advanced than the lectures.

“The English language is the biggest obstacle in our curriculum, as we don't have many vocabularies, therefore, when tutors use new words, or different words to what was mentioned in their slides, we feel lost.”

Sarah/MIS

Bashayer and Nibras, on the other hand, find their curriculum easy to understand and that it is not difficult to follow the subjects.

“In general, our curriculum is good, as when I study I tend to understand without difficulty, because lecture slides are available to us, and it has been organized according to our tutor’s lecturing method.”

Bashayer/HA

“The Curriculum is quite good.”

Nibras/HR

Nonetheless, other students find the physical setting of the university and the capacity of their classes to be the core problem for their understanding of their subjects

(Appendix 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22):



“In one class students reached 124 ... sometimes if I came late I had to borrow a chair from the next room so that I can even sit in this class ...in such a class, the interaction with the tutor is very difficult, especially for those who sit in the last three rows...”

Mashael/PAD

“Our numbers were large. Sometimes we reached 120 to 130 per class: I think this is a problem and should be solved”

Arwa B./MIS

Other students meanwhile were blaming the university’s food and catering, since the lack of healthy food affected their level of concentration in their opinion. In addition, quality canteens are usually located a long way from lecture buildings, and with limited time between lectures, some students just stopped eating during the university day or were forced to bring in some meals from home.

“We have building No.18 where the food canteen is located, but it serves the entire university with students from different schools, so the queue to buy food might take an hour or more, so by the time I purchase food the next lecture would have started and food is not allowed in classes.”

Haifa/Economics

“There are some small canteens distributed around the campus, but honestly they are

not clean and we feel sick when the smell of frying dissipates in the early hours of the day.”

Dareen/Accounting

“We heard about a food poisoning case because of the poor hygiene level in some canteens, so we are avoiding buying food from the university.”

Mashaël/PAD

“I only eat from the chocolate vending machine, because it’s the safest option on campus.”

Yosra/Finance

However, within this stage of the learning experience journey (university context) students are not only attending lectures, they are also exposed to different learning resources, such as the library and computer pool, which affects students’ learning directly.



In some cases, these resources shape the student’s learning strategy, as in Bashayer’s case for instance:

“Not all the resources are available ... shortages on recommended books in bookshops, and in our library ... therefore I often study from the Power Point slides.”

Ahad/Accounting

Others find the existence of computers and printers might help and aid their learning process, and that their absence could be an obstacle to the learning process: as emerged in questionnaire responses about learning barriers:

“Failure to provide computers and difficulty in printing at the university.”

S61

“When computers are available some applications are blocked.”

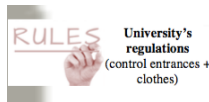
S66

In addition, Dareen found that the existence of such technology as computer facilities and printers is not good enough for students, as it needs regular maintenance to continue functioning properly:

“I wish they would repair the computers as most of them suffer from viruses and other problems.”

Arwa A./Accounting

Students described many services that the university provides to help improve their learning experience, however, they found that restricted operating times (short opening times) and full lecture schedules can minimize the benefit from these resources:



“Our library is available for everyone, but it has restricted opening times, therefore I prefer to log in to the Online Library.”

Najd/BUS

Students find these restrictions unsuitable for their learning needs:

“It was exactly two years ago, when the restriction on opening times started ... it used to be permitted to go out before 10 am, but now I wonder why they applied this new system ... I'm not sure about any advantage or how it's going to prevent those girls who checkout at 10 from loitering outside the university ... if I want to behave in such a way, I can go out after 10 and I'm still able to do anything.”

Sarah/MIS

Therefore, the time for students to benefit from these resources is limited as they can only use them in break time, between lectures, or cancel one lecture to obtain what they need from the library or follow up on some paperwork at the School Office.

“We are asking about something in a building, then get sent to a remote building on the university campus and after the effort of walking there and cancelling lectures we

found that the answer is not there either, but in a third building and so on... .. it is possible to spend your day going from one office to another or from one employee to another, missing lectures.”

Dareen/Accounting

Nevertheless, the university opening hours was not the only regulation that students talked about: as Sita (from Riyadh) complained about the clothes issue, where she has to come to the university with a long skirt and a modest top. Moreover, the modesty regulations differ from one member of staff to another: as Sita claimed that short sleeved tops can be allowed one day but not on another, depending on the security officer that day. In addition, the up-to-date fashion appearance required by some social groups is adding more financial difficulties. Therefore, Sita suggested having a standard uniform across the whole university:

“Having a uniform will save us time and effort with personal interpretations ... plus I don't like to be judged by my appearance, and I don't like the social strata discrimination between students themselves.”

Sita/DCU

On the other hand, this issue did not appear in the Jeddah investigation:

“We wear whatever we want, but it has to be modest, skirts, trousers, anything... I remember that Security at one point arrested a girl who was wearing a short top that was showing her tummy.”

Noor/MIS

In addition, the tutors in Jeddah appear to wear trousers, unlike Riyadh, where trousers are prohibited inside the campus for both Business School staff and students.

“Wearing trousers is common practice here among tutors and students.”

Noor/MIS

Thereafter, and within the university context, students also have access to other learning activities such as volunteering work inside the campus. Although the university has a limited number of places and they are not well promoted, students nevertheless prefer to work inside the campus to establish deep understanding of their subjects' “management” and to forge a link between theory and practice.

“Such activities get us out of the boredom and the daily routine of monotonous lectures ...they include field trips ... it affects the student positively... Incidentally, there is a club for each Department under the Faculty of Administration and Economy... I find it excellent and have learnt new skills such as Graphic Design.”

Mashaël/PAD

In addition, these voluntary jobs make it easier for students with strict families who could be against females working at night or at the weekends, as some families found that placements for girls are not mandatory in order for them to graduate, as in the Business Faculty, and are optional instead so can be replaced with other elective modules.

“Most girls here in Saudi Arabia are not working or developing their jobs skills through placements, and they depend on their university to provide these opportunities ... the main reason for this issue is that their families do not help to achieve placements as many of the parents do not have the confidence to send their daughters to work on placements before graduating from college...”

Nibras / HR

However, for those students who want to develop their practical skills in jobs and fieldwork, they find themselves facing only this challenging option with volunteering jobs at university with very limited spaces.

“Girls cannot find the right opportunity to volunteer working at university for many reasons: there is a very short time between exam time and what the University offers as an opportunity for volunteer work, and they usually have a limited number available anyway...”

Atheer /Accounting

Nevertheless, students acknowledge the importance of these placements, as they want to link what they already learned theoretically with real world business tasks, to improve their skills.

“We have been taught theoretically enough but when we come out into the labour

market in the future I feel there will be a shortage of knowledge and a need for greater experience and practice of what we have learned. I feel I am not involved enough in the practical side of our course.”

Yosra/HR

Therefore, many students suggest that the university should provide more chances for volunteering jobs, or secure deals with third parties outside the university and make it compulsory for students, in order to graduate from their courses, so that families have no other option than to send their daughters to complete their required fieldwork:

“I suggested this cooperation between the university and job providers to increase the confidence of the parents to let their daughters to go and work, like a compulsory subject so that parents cannot object.”

Nibras / HR

“My parents did not allow me to go for a placement as it’s optional. I therefore had to take two extra modules to complete the graduation requirements ... when I had an assignment to go and talk to employees in companies, my father had to agree as I did not have any other choice other than to lose the assignment grades.”

Najd/Bus.

“We need practical tasks and more placements instead of essays and research for graduation.”

S64/as stated in suggestion

Student and university contact



This part, of the students’ journey within university context plays an influential role, where students first make responses relating to their course work. By contacting the faculty member of staff, outside the lectures (tutors or administrators): students are reacting to the academic subject with basic involvement as follows:

1. Student-staff contact

Students tend to get in contact with the administrative staff for many reasons: fixing

their timetable for the current semester, asking about their approved course plan, school requirements, GPA issues, registration documents, official letters and statements, and for graduation paperwork. However, students only have a face-to-face contact option with regard to the administrative staff (such as in the Registration Unit or Student Services), as their emails are not known, and students claim that they never answer phone calls.

“I don’t think they have email addresses for students to use ... I don’t even trust that they would answer emails.”

Ohood/Law

Although the university provides an application for fixing timetables remotely (ODUS or My KAU), students find themselves restricted when choosing their modules and they therefore have to visit the administrative staff to resolve these issues:

“Why have they not conquered the system, with full validity to register modules each term, so that we choose any module and enroll in it directly? Why do we have to go back to them personally? The system is excellent but not fully activated.”

Fatemah/PAD

Nevertheless, students also complain about staff behaviour when they come in contact with them:

“We rarely find the administrative staff interested in answering our questions ... mostly they are rude and avoid responding to our questions.”

Sita/International Finance

“Some of them are very sophisticated but others behave so badly to the utmost degree.”

Nibras/HR

However, some students interpret the negative staff attitude as being due to the absence of competition between public universities and there is no need to achieve student satisfaction, therefore, according to students, the staff tend to display a

careless attitude:

“Some staff need to learn how to deal with students. As the university or college is public, they deal with us in this way. By the way, they are paid to deal with us properly ...like any client is dealt with...”

Yosra/Finance

Moreover, students find themselves only receiving minimum academic advice from the administrative staff, especially regarding specialized requirements and inquiries about their GPA level, if it declines.

“ ... Lack of academic advice such as the requirements for specialties/schools, including no assistance when changing my field of study from one school to another.”

S30/ stating her learning experience

“I was misled with academic advice through a member of staff ... therefore I ended up joining the Business School instead of the Medical School.”

Noor/MIS

The same experience was shared by Dareen:

“I was surprised by this information as no one alerted me to this point... If I had known this point, honestly, I wouldn't have enrolled at the Faculty of Business Administration, at least I could have joined the Faculty of Science to achieve my goal of enrolling at one of the Health Colleges... Consequently, I found myself stuck at the Faculty of Business Administration and have no other choice but to continue studying in it.”

Dareen/ Accounting

As a result, students lost their confidence in the level of staff knowledge:

“After this experience, I will never trust any administrative staff with any advice they try to give us.”

Arwa A./Accounting

2. Student-Tutor contact

When students are exposed to the curricula and their course subjects at lectures; they interact with them inside lectures to ask tutors or by contacting tutors after lectures to find answers related to course subjects (assignments, exams, or just to clarify difficult matters).

Students contact tutors outside lectures by six methods: firstly, face-to-face in tutor's office during office hours (office hours are when a tutor spends compulsory hours at her desk during a week to be available for office work, student contact and academic consultation).

“When we get to the office usually tutors do not comply with their office hours or maybe they give us the wrong timetable ... we go without an appointment, but tutors give us their timetable for their office hours to come along whenever we need without an appointment.”

Haifa/Economics

“Some tutors say they can only be reached during their office hours, and we are barely attending lectures going from one building to another, and frankly, this method does not work and I never went to a tutor in her office hours.”

Nibras/HR

Secondly, students contact their tutors using **My KAU or ODUS** (similar to Blackboard).

“Now there is My KAU, a new application, some of the tutors respond to us.”

Dareen/Accounting

“In My KAU they contact us through a one-way communication method as they only use it for announcements ... some of them don't like to use social media.”

Fatimah/PAD

“There is an application called "My KAU"... this application has many problems: sometimes it won't work for two to three hours, thus we cannot send or receive messages! Honestly, there is only one professor who uses this application.”

Mashaël/PAD

Thirdly, using the office telephone extension number: this method of contact for

communication is very popular among male tutors. However, not all students use it, because they feel embarrassed to contact male tutors.

“We contact our male tutor using his office number at specific times... will get lucky if they answered... I called him only once and was successful as he answered me... not all students use this method, because they feel shy to talk to a man.”

Arwa B./Law

Fourthly, having a female supervisor to act as a mediator between female students and male tutors:

“Some male tutors refuse or do not have an extension number at their office, so they make us contact them via the female supervisors ... I find it difficult and a waste of our time for simple answers.”

Noor/MIS

Fifthly, using emails:

“Contacting tutors is a problem in the Science Foundation Year ... they never answered emails.”

S96/ stating learning barriers

“Each tutor has her mode of contacting ... emails is one of the methods.”

Yosra/ Finance

“There are some tutors who direct us to use emails but they only respond after a long time...”

Najd/Bus.

Finally, the use of social media to get in contact with tutors:

1- WhatsApp®: Students prefer this method for its instant dialogues between themselves and their tutors.

“We used to take a tutor’s mobile number to create a WhatsApp group with her ... WhatsApp is the best method as if we ask a question, the tutor will answer at the same moment and that’s important especially on an exam night.”

Dareen/Accounting

Students do not only create groups using WhatsApp to get in touch directly with their tutors, but some tutors have their own approaches for using such an application: as they allow students in each class to elect only one student who represents the whole class and acts as the mediator between the tutor and her peers. This elected student is the only one who can be in direct contact with the tutor outside lectures, sending her all the students' enquiries and questions and, in return, she forwards all the information given by the tutor to her class colleagues using WhatsApp.

“Usually the tutor only gives her mobile phone number to the elected leader of our class, who acts like a link between us and the tutor.”

Haneen/PAD

However, not all tutors use WhatsApp to contact students:

“Some tutors who are freshers, junior and closer to our generation allow us to use WhatsApp: an easier and faster method of communication. And, of course, the Doctors who were senior and veterans do not allow us to communicate with them through this application.”

Nibras/HR

2- Twitter:

“Personally, I like using Twitter, because tutors react at the same time.”

Muradi/Marketing

3- Google group: usually tutors are the individuals who use Google Group - they create these groups and then add students:

“Some professors prefer to be communicated with via Google Group, as they establish it and then add us. Each tutor has her own way of communicating and it is not the same for every tutor.”

Atheer/Accounting

In conclusion to this part of the learning experience, it is evident that commencing the learning experience journey would start by entering the university's campus and

becoming part of the university's learning system.

4.2.1.2 Family, cultural and religious influences

The learning experience journey would be successfully executed when female students individually recognise the family cultures and manners, respect them and carry them with them in each step of this journey alongside religious beliefs. Therefore, in the rich picture diagram the Saudi Arabian female student appears wearing her own family's values.

These values vary from one family to another but remain under the same general umbrella of religious beliefs and Saudi Arabian culture.

For example, Noor's family permits her to go to the university with a private driver (who works with her family), while her friend cannot go to the university with a driver that is not a family member:

“...I offered her a lift with my driver but she refused to go with me and had to wait for her brother to come and collect her from university once he had finished his lecture... she would have a big problem if her father knew that she did not come home with her brother.”

Noor/MIS

Haneen's family, in another instance, restricted her options to choose her field of study by not allowing her to study in any course that has any physical mixed gender classes:

“I could not enroll in a medical discipline for the same reason - mixed gender classes.”

Haneen/ PAD

In contrast, Yosra's father was encouraging her to study Dentistry as she fulfilled all the requirements to enroll in the Medical School, but this was not her wish:

“My father proposed Dentistry as a field of study but I never wanted to study in Medical School... he did not object to my wish, in contrast, he encouraged me to study whatever I wanted.”

Yosra/Finance

In these previous cases, the general religion and the Saudi Arabian tradition have not been breached. However, each family interpreted religion and culture to suit their own values. As in the transportation issue, each example has applied the Saudi Arabian rule for driving vehicles, that it has to be conducted by males only. And in the mixed gender classes case, both classes of mixed and segregated genders are allowed in Saudi Arabian universities, but the mixed gender classes have to be with special criteria, such as that females have to be wearing the hijab and conservative clothes: such as a long white coat (knee length) in Medical Schools. Hence, the Masjid (Mosque) symbol is representing Saudi Arabian Law and the Islamic religion that controls this journey and justifies all decisions and regulations that emerge during the learning experience.

Although this factor of the learning experience has been placed in a frame within the model of the learning experience, the influence of this special component on the female learning experience does not have a start or end points. It is rather a continuance effect that flows throughout the learning experience and it has an influential mark on each component and factor of Saudi female's learning experience. As clarified earlier, the family culture starts to affect students learning experience from the moment they step outside their houses and take a mean of transportation to the university: only 4/119 (3.4%) questionnaires' responses considered transportation issues as a learning obstacle:

“All of my monthly allowance is spent on transportation.”

S90

“Transportation and subscription to buses are my biggest problems.”

S61

“My bus does not leave the campus until all registered girls are gathered. This means that sometimes we could wait until 3 or 4 pm.”

Atheer/ Accounting

“Some students are unable to find a male driver, and others complain about the high cost of transportation prices, especially those who commute every day from Mecca or Khulais.”

Fatemah/ PAD

Families' cultural role and religion influences appear also in universities' regulation favoring and respecting families' beliefs. Having restricted operation times (short open times) for female students is an act from university administration to gain families' trust of sending their daughters every day to the university. It is a way of keeping parents knowledgeable about the place of their daughters during specific time of the day. Although accepting such a restricted time for learning differs from one family to another, it remains under the public university reputation to represent the government with respect to the families, traditions, and values.

In addition, the families' role appears in the placement phase, where they all depend on the university's actions: as if it is compulsory for passing a course, families then will have to send their daughters to complete such placements. But if it was optional, some restricted families will not accept for their daughters to undergo placements in order to protect them from the dangers of the work place (especially mixed gender environment) that could affect their morals, decency and their family's beliefs:

“Most girls here in Saudi Arabia do not work or develop their jobs skills through placements...the main reason for this issue is that their families do not help to achieve it, and many of the parents do not have the confidence to send their daughters to work on placements...”

Nibras / HR

Furthermore, the families' role that affects learning experience appears in other components of the learning experience: in the part of existing peers, social networking for learning and similarly with the final phase of learning experience that is reaching the learning goal of achieving high grades:

“When I'm stuck in my assignments, my mom usually asks me if I know older students who could offer to help me.”

Noor/ MIS

“I can't talk to or text male students, my parents would freak out, but I prefer to ask my friend to do it and then just forward any useful information regarding our studies.”

Najd/ Bus.

“My aim is to graduate with full marks to please my parents as I was a bit of a disappointment to them when I could not enroll in Medical School.”

S115/ stating her learning goals

4.2.1.3 Peers (the existing of other students)

This factor pertaining to the learning experience journey is where female students are initially introduced to the community within the university campus. It welcomes Saudi Arabian female students from all over the city from a multitude of backgrounds, different learning experiences, and from a variety of levels/years of their courses. This is the first step Saudi Arabian female students must take towards building a relationship with this community, whether to result in friendship or a formal relationship purely for learning purposes.

“You have to be smart with your colleagues at university: some of them only want you to be a source of study information without exchanging any benefit.”

Bashayer/HA

Although female students are firm when it comes to constructing bonds with each other, they never hesitate, however, to help any student who is in need of study advice. Normally any request for assistance comes with certain conditions:

“It has to be during term time ... on the night before an exam, I turn my mobile off.”

Noor/MIS

“When a student contacts me only once or twice during the exam period, that’s fine, but if she keeps communicating during exams: I won’t hesitate to block her.”

Najd/Bus.

Consequently, they form solidarity by helping each other during the exam period, but they justify their actions as good deeds:

“I believe in Karma ... whatever I do now will come back to me in the future.”

Muradi/Marketing

“For no particular reason, maybe she would do Doa’a (prayers) for god to answer my own prayers ... as she might be a good religious girl who god answers, whatever prayers she has.”

Fatima/PA

This solidarity action may penetrate the university's regulations, as students might justify their plagiarism or cheating (passing answers around during exams) as an obligation of being a loyal friend:

"I don't understand why we cannot help each other during exams my friend and I are studying together in each and every task, so why don't we continue such cooperation during exams too?"

Nibras/HR

"As no one helped us during term time with either learning resources or academic advice, they have no right to tell us off when we stick together during exams and pass information to each other."

Sita/International Finance

However, only one university acknowledged such an issue and took action about it: (they facilitate student support study classes, where the bright students can help other students who are finding it hard to understand a given subject.)

"I volunteered in such classes: to officially help peers and to enrich my CV, and then I was rewarded with a Certificate."

Fatima/Accounting

However, the other university only applies penalties if rules are breached:

"Yes, we do have many cheating cases - we risk it sometimes - as the penalties can include exclusion or failing the subject completely."

Najd/Bus.

Moreover, Saudi Arabian female students extend their connection to include male students also. In Jeddah, female students envy their male peers as they can interact face-to-face with their male tutor so that the tutor can read their facial expression to sense their level of understanding. Therefore, female students attempt to reach male students to ask them advice pertaining to the course and, since they did not interact directly with the tutor outside the lectures, female students wanted to understand his testing methods and his recommended resources to read for the exams. Consequently, the effort that female students make to reach males students is huge. As they do not see them physically on campus, many female students try to find their male peers using the Internet (social media: such as Facebook[©] or Twitter[©]):

"Via Facebook we knew this boy who was willing to pass his private number to us and then we contacted him using WhatsApp... he told us where this tutor gets his tests

questions: it was from an American website... without this boy, I would not have passed this module."

Bashayer/HA

Moreover, because of the cultural barriers between genders, female students build their own perception about males' learning strategies and act upon this, as they think that male students have the privilege of being Saudi Arabian males who are expected to perform better than females both during their studies and in exams:

"Most of the lectures were shared with male peers via CCTV lectures: boys, for example, only study certain chapters of the course book based on their tutor's hidden recommendations, while we, as female students, have to study the whole book from A to Z, without deleting anything from the curriculum."

Dareen/Accounting

In addition, female students feel that their curriculum is different compared to the males' in terms of content and tasks:

"Whoever designed the girl's curricula underestimated their minds and abilities."

Fatima/PA

Thus, these claims might explain the solidarity that female students use in order to face challenging tasks and exams. However, these movements of unity which female students make in their learning experience journey result from a deeper interaction between them, in a step that will be discussed and proven in the next component of the learning experience model (the social connection for learning).

Moreover, as discussed at the previous point (4.2.1.2), the family's cultural and religious influence can be noted regarding contact by phone with male students as Saudi Arabian culture does not permit women having a friendship with men out of marriage if not being close relatives (father, grandfather, brother, uncle, son, grandchild or husband). However, in this learning experience Saudi Arabian females do not talk to men by phone or by face-to-face contact, they are instead using the Internet (social media) to write to male students and exchange information. Thus, they have found a way to contact male students without breaking any cultural values or offending family beliefs.

“We are only contacting them via Facebook or Twitter using private messages ... my parents would not accept hearing a male voice over my cell phone ...they might take me out of university.”

Noor/MIS

To conclude this first component of the learning experience model (the learning experience factors), it is evidenced that this phase is where students take their first steps of learning in higher education to subsequently then start their own learning journey. It can be noted that mostly in this phase female students' roles are likely to be absent, which means that they only take the role of receiving information and observing the culture of university. In contrast, their role shines out more in the following phase of the learning experience.

4.2.2 Student Social Network for Learning

This component of the learning journey is linked strongly with the previous stage (learning experience factors including the university's input), as this stage fulfills some missing learning gaps in the university context. In addition, it helps to construct - based on the previous part of the learning experience - certain study and learning strategies besides encouraging students to take important learning decisions. Therefore, the former phase triggers this one, or in other words, this phase is a reaction to the previous one. Here, the students' role is more active than in the earlier step, with students taking full responsibility and ownership to complete this part of their learning journey. As female students collect information from both the university context and other different sources such as peers and former students, they then conduct their own analysis to reach decisions regarding their field of study, learning approaches and strategies.

As students only receive minimal academic advice from university staff and limited (with some female tutors) communication or non-communication (with most of the male tutors); female students therefore search for other sources of information and alternative consultants to help them make their own decisions regarding their learning strategy and their learning courses.

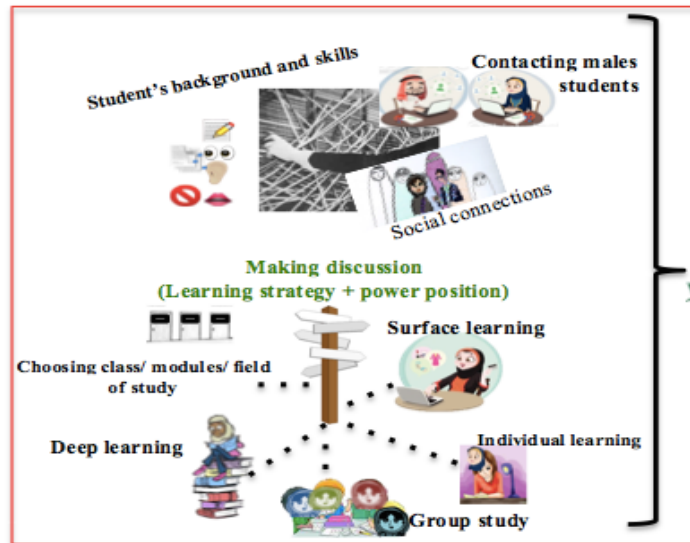


Figure 4.4 Students using different resources to make learning decision, as part of personal learning network

When students feel uncertain about a specific course to enroll in, have a gap in knowledge regarding an assignment or test, or are not sure even how to study the course material, or which source they should read from, students then use two sources of information to supplement the limited contact with tutors and staff: namely, **student's background and skills** and **students' social connections**. Therefore, students try to link each source to each need they have, for example, when a student is not sure which subject she should take this semester, she will then ask a former student (older student) for advice on this subject. Consequently, students are acting similarly to a switchboard porter, who links each wire to each outlet, hence the picture on the rich diagram (metaphor linking each resource to each learning and study need).

1- **Student's background and skills**: when students enroll at the university they bring with them some learning skills which they have adapted during their school learning level. These skills and their school background experience transfer with them to the university level.

One of the items of knowledge which students bring with them to the university from their school level is the “grade obsession”, where students strive to achieve full marks in every assignment and exam, and if they drop one or two grades, they acquire a negative attitude about their study.

“It is possible that this mentality has been established from a very young age as there was competition between girls in Elementary School and, therefore I feel that this concept has come with them to their university level study.”

Haneen/PAD

“I used to have this belief at high school level, but got rid of it later on during advanced level study at the university”

Mashaal/PAD

“It is possible that in the days of school level study the result of dropping grades or having lower marks was the cause of an anger attitude from the family and a problematic response. I expect that if the response had been a simple admonishment by the parents, this issue would not have become such an issue.”

Atheer/Accounting

Therefore, students use the skills and learning background they already possess to decide how to study their curriculum. In this case using the obsession about grades will lead them to make decisions about their learning strategy: which means adapting the norms of their school level study, for example, having summaries of the subjects taught and memorizing the material within these.

Consequently, the researcher named this action “operating on switchboard”, as the student acts like an operator who has a call on the switchboard (in this case material waiting to be studied) and because of her lack of academic advice, the student links this situation to her own learning background, which is the obsession about grades. She therefore connects this to the memorizing method of studying, which she has brought with her from school. This is the only connection she is equipped to make.

However, some students refer to other reasons behind this obsession about grades, which could be the increasing number of graduates compared to the decreasing job opportunities. Therefore, they are trying to achieve higher grades to increase the possibility of being employed.

“It is possible for girls to act like that to avoid the fear of getting a job, knowing that everyone says there are few jobs available and high numbers of graduates in some subjects. Nevertheless, I do think we are also trying to make sure we do what we actually have power over: which is achieving full marks.”

Nibras/HR

However, the grades as an aim will be discussed later on this chapter.

2- Students' social connections: students established a vast connection with each other, be it with friends, peers, former experienced students, or related staff. Within this connection base students answer each other about enquiries, reminders of deadlines, exams and homework. They also explain the difficult parts of the subject to each other and provide academic advice.

"In the Preparatory Year I was adrift and confused ... I heavily depended on my friends and their group of friends ... I asked them for information regularly about almost everything related to university... if a student has no connection in university she will be lost."

Fatimah/PAD

"We recommend modules to each other... as female students we tend to help each other. We recommend teachers who are easy with grades and not difficult on exams."

Dareen/Accounting

These connections have been introduced to students by friends, who in turn know other friends, or via the students' forum, where telephone numbers can be exchanged, and then students get in touch. Afterward, these connections stay active around the campus via social media (Twitter[®], Facebook[®], WhatsApp[®]).

Table 4.1: The usage of social media for supporting Saudi Arabian female students' learning.

Order	Form of social media	Percentage
#1	WhatsApp [®] (KAU: 87 out of 98 (89%) and PNU: 92 out of 108 (85.2%))	87%* (Total of 179 out of 206)
#2	Twitter [®] (KAU: 16 out of 98 (16.3%) and PNU: 26 out of 108 (24.1%))	20.4% (Total of 42 out of 206)
#3	Emails (KAU: 4 out of 98 (4.1%) and PNU: 8 out of 108 (7.4%))	5.8% (Total of 12 out of 206)
#4	YouTube [®] (KAU: 6 out of 98 (6.2%) and PNU: 4 out of 108 (3.7%))	5% (Total of 10 out of 206)
#5	Black Berry Messenger [®] (KAU: 1 out of 98 (1%) and PNU: 4 out of 108 (3.7%))	2.4% (Total of 5 out of 206)
#6	Instagram [®] (KAU: 3 out of 98 (3.1%) and PNU: 1 out of 108 (0.9%))	2% (Total of 4 out of 206)
#6	University forum (KAU: 4 out of 98 (4.1%) and PNU: 0 out of 108 (0%))	2% (Total of 4 out of 206)
#8	Others: Such as subject related websites, Path, Telegram, Skype, Line, Edmodu, Google [®] research engine, Dictionary apps and Kik.	NA (as each application has only one response)
* Total questionnaire responses are 257, but 51 of them did not answer the questions related to learning support systems, therefore the total number of answers to this subject are 206.		

However, connection has not only been used for learning purposes, or as a guide in university, it has been used also to guarantee a place in the required school/specialties.

“Enrolling in this college after passing the Preparatory Year was not my choice... I know a friend, who has exactly the same GPA as mine, and she’s got accepted in Human Medicine, but I’m not, and that was only because she has a staff acquaintance ... so unfair.”

Sarah/MIS

“Because my father works at the Medical School, he held me a place and he knows the School requirement so I enrolled in it ... despite my father’s favour.”

Yosra/Finance

Nevertheless, social connection also extends to male students, as seen in point 4.2.1.3 (peers).

However, Bashayer was lucky to find this male student who is attending the same course she is, but Dareen could not find a male student to contact. Dareen argued that finding a male student, who is attending the same course as hers, is impossible if you are depending only on Twitter or Facebook, as it is time consuming and not guaranteed. Therefore, she suggested opening up communication with male students under the supervision of the university using the University Official Forum:

“I understand that my suggestion could be taken negatively, and that our culture won’t allow such interaction to prevent an intimate relationship, but with supervision from the university this sort of relationship wouldn’t happened and, anyway, we only need to discuss our courses and learning needs.”

Dareen/Accounting

As a result of constructing such social connections with friends, peers and with male students, females then can utilize these connection as trusted resources to make their own decisions regarding their learning needs. However, the foundation of that trust has been home grown by the students since the time of university enrolment and subsequently it gradually concreted over into a network as the students matured through their learning experience. This mature network in social connection starts from a vast number of connections, by joining many student social groups, for learning and studying. Later, this circle of connection shrinks with more experience to include only elite members who have the right source for information and fulfill all the requirements: to be a bright student, have stronger connections with other powerful groups, stylish and also willing to exchange information.

“I turn off my mobile the night before any exams to avoid needy girls who just turn up during their hour of need, but who you can’t find when you need them.”

Sarah/MIS

“When we started at university the system was totally unusual compared to the school level ... it feels like swimming in the sea against the waves, and having a group of students to be your source of information seemed to be the only way to survive drowning.”

Haifa/Economic

“Together with my chosen social circle, I still help new and immature students during term time, and when I’m on the university campus ... but outside university is only for my chosen groups.”

Noor/MIS

“I don’t like to be judged upon my look ... who started the rules for joining such groups?”

Sita/International Finance

However, these established connections help students’ learning and decision making. Upon social group advice, a student can decide to study from books, look at summaries, or visit websites, whether as part of group studies, with friends, or solely for her own work.

“I joined a group for each module in this term to exchange information. However, I prefer to study with my friend ... just one friend: I go to her place or she comes to mine.”

Nibras/HR

In addition, these groups help students to be aware of the university’s regulations and rules, such as the case of Noor when she tried to change her field of study. Moreover, these connections can give students advice regarding the best tutors to take a module with or the worst one, who should be avoided.

“If a tutor has difficult tests or does not cooperate with students, I do not recommend her, when a new student asks for advice.”

Ohood/Law

Nevertheless, these strategies of learning and academic advice can be altered, based on the feedback students get during exams. For example, if students score high grades in exams that means their learning strategy is correct and the advisor is trustworthy, but if they perform poorly during exams that means changes in learning strategies are needed. The student must look for new social groups and exit the current group (not trustworthy).

“Grades are vital measurements for both sides, tutors ... and for us, to test our strategy and to test the value of joining a WhatsApp group, for example.”

Najd/Bus.

Consequently, the next and final part of the Saudi Arabian female learning experience is accomplishing both learning goals and the ability to judge the worthiness of a student's current social network.

4.2.3 Achieving higher grades

This phase (component) is the last one of the learning experience models. However, it does not mean that the learning experience would be finished by reaching this final part, it rather operates like a loop, that if an experience attains this level then all the previous steps are under test and only this step would validate the previous ones. Therefore, if the grades at the examinations are high this means that the previous part of the learning experience was correct, and the student should maintain the same choices to finish the current term with a high GPA. Nonetheless, if grades were low then the student has to revise all of their learning experience steps, reevaluate and then replace the step that the student feels is the cause of this poor performance.

“Yep, that is when we decide whether to leave a Facebook group or keep the connection.”

Muradi/Marketing

Grades are also a means for Saudi families to assess the performance of their daughters: to make sure that they are busy studying and not busy with something else.

“Grades are a big deal for my family, as I study with my friend Hana all the time, whether at her house or at mine and sometimes at a coffee house, so if my grades are low this privilege of me going out might stop as a punishment.”

Najd/Bus.

“My family has always supported me, whether with high or low grades, as they see that I am doing my best in my studies.”

Nibrs/HR

Moreover, the family does not only use the grades for judging, female students also use them as a tool to assess the quality of the lectures and to evaluate the tutor's academic skills.

“It reflects the ability of our tutor to transmit information to us, but if the questions were difficult that means the tutor is unqualified to lecture.”

Ohood/Law

However, achieving high grades is the key that opens the way towards all the goals for the students: it can help to obtain future jobs, dreams, make the family proud and bring satisfaction as a successful female student.

“My goal for now is to graduate with the highest GPA I can possibly reach.

Then I will think about the future.”

Fatima/PAD

“Higher grades can guarantee a job.”

S47

In conclusion, this phase of the Saudi Arabian learning experience is the main achievement of the whole journey and it is not the end but rather a loop that allows another spin of the wheel for the learning journey, to start again, whether with new social groups, or with the beginning of a new academic term.

4.3 Chapter Conclusion and the proposed theory

The findings have led to build a better understanding of the female students' learning experience in Saudi Arabian Higher Education. In this chapter, the participants' views and understanding of their own learning experience have been presented in the rich picture diagram. Then, the model of learning experience for Saudi Arabian females was extracted for that rich picture. The model illustrated the component of learning experience in Saudi Arabian public universities and showed that in order to have such an experience, the learning journey will be influenced by the different phases which are: learning experience factors (where the university's input, family and cultural influence and the existence of peers all can shape such an experience for Saudi Arabian female students), students' social connection for learning (where students have the active role of mastering this phase, choosing and rejecting social groups), and finally achieving the highest grades possible as a goal and as a mean to assess the previous phases. The last phase is not the end of the learning experience, but it is an

indicator as to whether to maintain the same learning strategy or use a different one. This ultimately shaped the relationship between the desired goal outcomes and the learning and study strategy which should be used by students to reach the end of this learning journey, which is to successfully graduate.

The relationship between these components of the female learning experience in Saudi Arabian public universities is established by assessing the student’s responses, however, when compared to literature which explains such a relationship the following model has been reached as a proposed theoretical framework:

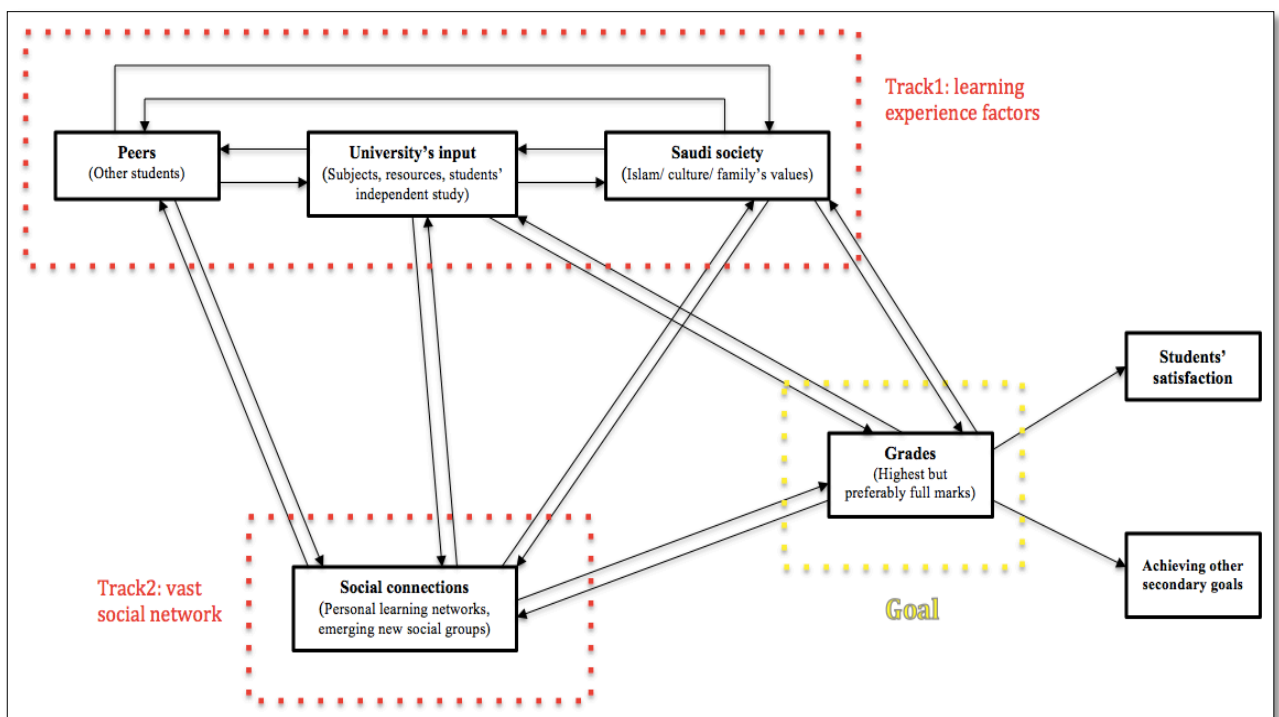


Fig. 4.5: proposed learning experience theoretical framework, after removing picture from the results model and confirm labels with existing literature

In the next chapter, the findings in relation to the existing literature are discussed and evaluated. The implications of the substantive theoretical framework to Higher Education and research are discussed.

Chapter 5:

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings and main themes of the model of the female learning experience journey in Saudi Arabia at public universities, in the context of the existing literature. Despite the fact that there are different theories to explain the learning experience: behavioural (such as situated learning theory and female social capital), influential (such as cultural background affecting students' learning strategies; and the quality of learning experience components affecting students' outcomes: a theory suggested by Neumann) or students' learning environment (such as personal learning networks theory), none of these theories can, however, explain the situation for female students in Saudi Arabia exclusively. My work (this PhD research) helps to explain the situation in Saudi Arabia by combining the previous theories, whilst this chapter starts by discussing the main theoretical concepts: personal learning networks which includes the type of learning environment that Saudi Arabian females experience and within which they form their identity as female students; Islam and Saudi Arabian culture adding further factors (religion, high grades and the shifting power position) to produce a theoretical context that could explain the learning experience journey for women in Saudi Arabia. In which they both draw the power position of gender in Saudi Arabia, and finally the female behaviour as undergraduate students and how they react under the influence of the previous concepts (the learning environment and Islam with Saudi Arabian culture) to shift the power position.

Next, the chapter will progress to show the link between these theoretical concepts of learning experience and how they are influencing the actual learning journey to achieve the desired goal: in this case high grades.

Then the chapter will move to answer the main research questions under the proposed theoretical framework: the first question (What are Saudi Arabian women's goals within higher education?). In this case it is scoring higher grades and reaching a higher GPA. Then the second question (What kind of personal learning environments do women experience in higher education in Saudi Arabia?) which presents the foundation of the women's learning experience journey in Saudi Arabian public

universities, as a social process of learning, whereby knowledge is co-constructed in a specific context and embedded within a particular social and physical environment, therefore personal learning networks give learning experience in Saudi Arabia a unique position and without it the current Saudi Arabian female learning experience model cannot exist. This chapter is also the place to discuss the use of social media as an important tool to establish such connections (e.g. WhatsApp and Twitter).

Subsequently, this chapter will attempt to illuminate the third main question (What are the obstacles that Saudi Arabian female undergraduate students encounter during their learning journey?) including: (culture, family traditions, religious beliefs and the university's learning resources) and placing it in the context of the relevant literature.

As a result, and to overcome these learning obstacles, the answer to the fourth question (How do women describe the quality of their learning experience in Saudi Arabian higher education?) will reveal and present the core of this research: Saudi Arabian female students create new roles for themselves in each environmental setting (trade in power position differently within family, university and among each other) to overcome their learning barriers and to reach their main goal, which is achieving higher grades. However, emerging as a social group, these female students need to feel involved in this peer group, which creates new restraints: the need to be an excellent student (the one who achieves high grades), appeared in both cases: Jeddah and Riyadh, and to be fashionable and modern (only appeared in the Riyadh case).

Finally, the chapter moves to consider students' suggestions to improve their learning experience as an answer to the fifth and last main research question (What would Saudi Arabian female students suggest to improve their learning experience?).

5.2 Proposed theoretical framework

This PhD study integrates several approaches of learning experience into one proposed theoretical context that defines the learning experience of Saudi Arabian females in public universities. It suggests that learning experience is about the students' perceptions of educational inputs they receive from their university and from Saudi Arabian society as a whole. Educational input from their university means: the university's educational course in terms of: [subjects (lectures and tutors,

exams and modules), resources (required textbooks) and the role of students' independent study], in addition to the existence of peers (other students within the university) who come across the learning journey. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabian society's educational input means that the values of students' families, culture and religious beliefs all shape and direct this learning experience. Although educational input from Saudi Arabian society contains learning obstacles imposed by Saudi Arabian traditions on females as students, conversely, these same difficulties motivate women (who are the students) to take that challenge on board and use it to enhance their learning journey, for example, student to student contact and student-tutor contact, which has to conform to religious/cultural rules. Logically, the journey of the Saudi Arabian female learning experience can be seen like a travelling train which moves above two parallel tracks: the first track is learning experience factors (given factors that students cannot cancel or ignore): the university's input, Saudi Arabian society inputs (religion/culture/and then family values), and students' peers. The second track is the vast social network those students create as fundamental resources to use for learning purposes and to overcome the cultural obstacles. Both tracks influence the position of students in Saudi Arabian society and shape their efforts to prove worthy of their educational status by achieving the crowning glory of the highest grades.

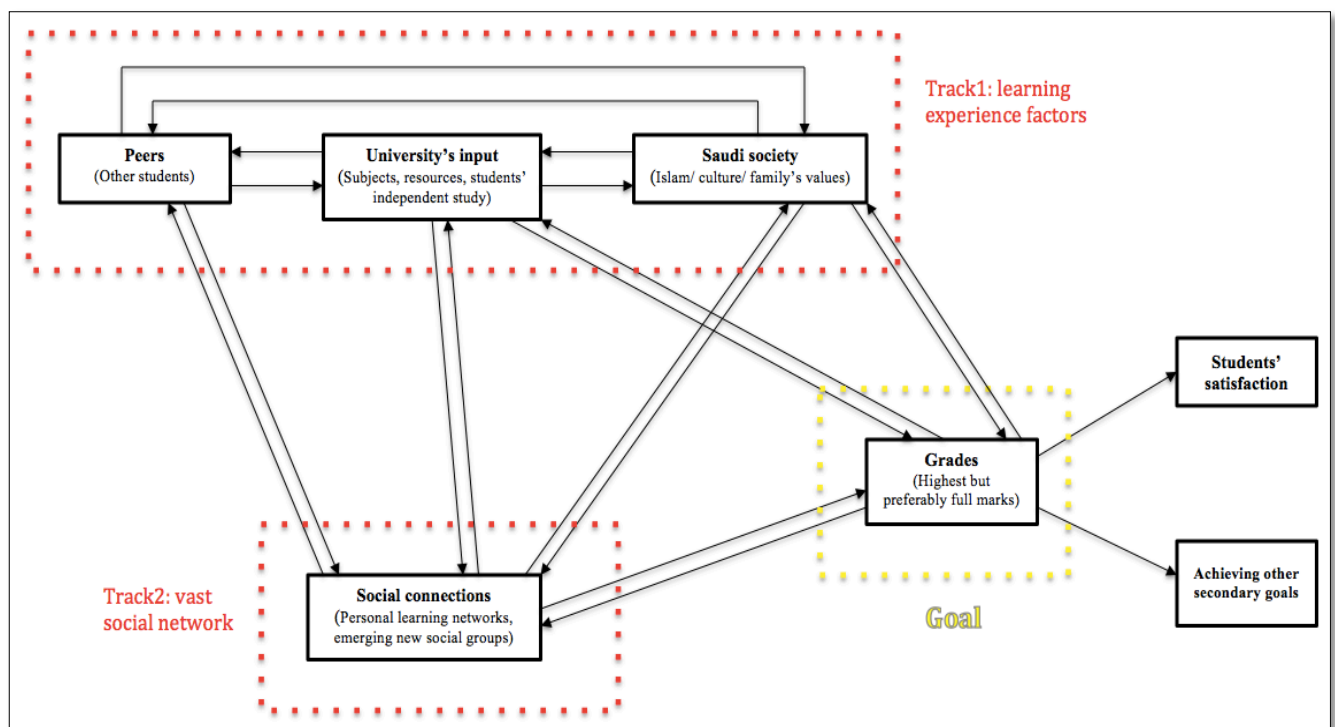


Fig. 5.1: Proposed learning experience theoretical framework

However, the proposed theoretical framework is not only a combination of existing theories; it is also adding further perspectives to the learning experience in Saudi Arabia for female students. These new additions are:

- Emerging exclusive Saudi Arabian form of social learning networks and collaborative learning: where female students are the facilitators and executors at the same time, while tutors only get invited to such a group or are asked to be a guest without any commitment or obligations (appeared in **5.2.1: Learning settings and personal learning environments**).
- The influence of Saudi Arabian Islamic culture, a culture defined by Islamic religious orders which are interpreted/tailored by Saudi Arabian traditions, on students' daily life: and how this additional factor can affect the learning experience. This original dimension added to represent learning experience in Saudi Arabia is explained under the subtitle **5.2.2 (The influence of religion, culture and family values)** of this chapter.
- Shifting the power position of females during the learning experience journey contrasting situated learning theory; where the identity of a student is being gradually developed to be a master student in learning practice where she can choose a social group to engage, discuss and exchange information with (one way of increasing development of the identity). However, in the Saudi Arabian female learning experience, even if the female student reached that level of mastering the learning practice, she still has to go backwards and forwards between identities to suit her society's requirements (appeared in **5.2.3: Students' behaviour and identity**).
- Learning experience for Saudi Arabian women is an empowering situation where they use it as a tool to confirm their position and equality rights compared to male students (appeared in **5.2.2: The influence of religion, culture and family values**).
- The ultimate goal (outcome) of the learning experience is achieving the highest grades and GPA (full marks if possible), which then determines the satisfaction of students and enables them to accomplish other secondary goals. This anticipated target appeared to uniquely justify the proposed theoretical framework of the Saudi Arabian learning experience (appeared in **5.2.1 (Learning settings and personal learning environments: includes personal**

learning networks) and **5.2.2** (The influence of religion, culture and family values).

However, in addition to previous literature, new additional approaches will be considered in the following discussion about the three approaches of the proposed theory.

5.2.1 Learning settings and personal learning environments

Students articulated their learning experience by pointing to the fountain of learning which is the university's environment and setting, as for the students it is the source of mapping their learning journey through their undergraduate course. Students divided the university's environment into course subjects, resources and the role of student independent study. According to students, using course subjects combined with resources will lead them to score their goals as an outcome and the link between these university's inputs with the output is the students' independent study. These learning experience components, which were suggested by students, are similarly to Neumann's (1993) theoretical perspective: as in both cases (this PhD study and Neumann's report) are combining three conceptual frameworks to produce the students' learning experience. The three combined theories of learning experience are: content theory (Astin, 1984), university's resources model (Cameron, 1981) and the student's flexibility theory (Chickering, 1981).

However, the Saudi Arabian female learning experience is not a simple equation, as there are other factors that were articulated by students which affect and shape this learning experience, which will be followed further in the next points of this chapter. Nevertheless, the students' illustration of learning experience is the identification of their learning environment, as they articulated it at a richer level including the relations between students and lecturers, students and students, students and learning support technologies, students and their learning motives and learning approaches, place of learning and students' conception of learning in higher education. Yet, these aspects of their learning environment have been grouped into three learning experience components: (course subjects, resources and the role of the students' independent study) in the proposed theoretical framework. Consequently, Saudi

Arabian female students in this study grasp what Abdulrab and his colleagues (2013) called: learning environment as a pedagogical perspective (Chapter 2: point 2.4.1.1).

However, these proposed components, clearly stated by students, are the starting points for the learning process. Course subjects mean: the lectures and the tutors, exams and modules. As each factor of the course subjects has an impact on the learning experience, for example, the quality of lectures and its relative value to the modules besides using attractive tools (relevant technology, e.g. power point, clips, case studies from Twitter) and the students invitation to discuss and to engage in lectures would all reflect positively on student learning, by making them profoundly understand their subjects and that would make them perform better in exams, according to Elham/Economics. These students' perception of teaching behaviour has confirmed what Valk and Marandi (2005) established, that these perceptions contribute to the use of deep approaches to learning (Chapter 2: point 2.4.1.1). In addition, the ability of the tutor to transfer information and the required key concepts of the subject to the students' understanding plays a huge role with regard to students engaging with their subjects and their subsequent performance in exams, as Noor/MIS stated in the results of this study. This also supports the conclusion of some studies in the literature (Garrison and Cleveland, 2005; Valk and Marandi, 2005 and Valle et al., 2009) that when teaching behaviour is oriented towards students, this will contribute to deep learning. Therefore, although I found through the questionnaire responses that some interviewees' answers related to CCTV lectures were largely negative, nevertheless, several students in this study (such as Ahad, Arwa, Atheer, Muradi and Nibras) stressed that the technology is never the problem, but that it is the method of lecturing which tutors follow, as they experienced some attractive CCTV lectures with deep understanding because of their skilled tutors who were able to implement such technology to transfer knowledge to their students. This confirms what Hasan and Gupta (2013) found in their study when they assessed a medical school's learning environment and found that students reviewed their lecturers as authoritarian. The issue here seems to be the gap in learning and teaching skills between different generations as these students have been learning and been taught by different methods compared to tutors when they were students. I recommend conducting training sessions for tutors to utilise technology in their lectures, which would bridge that gap,

and running a general campaign across the university that would raise the awareness of the required learning skills at undergraduate level.

Conversely, students in this study discussed not only the lectures as part of their learning environment, but they also included the physical setting surrounding lecturing and learning, which can be listed as “organizational settings” as part of the learning environment, according to the existing literature (Abdulrab et al., 2013). The campus climate and settings were the highlight of the physical environment, according to students in this study and include: air conditions within the classes, the capacity of the lecture halls, the maintenance of campus facilities (the hygiene of the facilities), suitable and up-to-date ICT and learning technologies, suggesting programs which support students’ learning with clear contacts and dedicated staff, and student services such as, sport facilities, healthy food, and the availability of student forums or seating areas across the university for formal and/or informal meetings. Although Saudi Arabian students in this study painted a clear image of their physical environment, the standards of these facilities were nonetheless not found to be wholly acceptable by the students. For instance, the unavailability of clean, healthy food and close seating areas made some students in this study overload their lecture timetables to avoid muscle fatigue due to walking around the campus to find a place to sit down or just to purchase clean food from a remote student forum (only one in each university and in both cases they are very far away and overcrowded with students from all over the campus schools). Here, students in this study established a direct link between physical environment quality and the satisfaction of the learning experience, which I think, in turn, could affect the learning process and overall learning experience. This potential connection has been confirmed in the literature (Chapter 2: point 2.1.4.2) that classes, students, tutors, administrators, ICT, and physical facilities and their structural designs, are all linked to each other and are essential contributors to learning effectiveness and experience (Fry, 2009; Stensaker et al., 2006; Sanoff, 2011; Radcliffe et al., 2008 and Tanner 2008). However, Saudi Arabian students in this study have not established any link between the physical settings and their learning outcomes.

When students in this study suggested elements of the learning environment (lectures, the tutors and modules) to be fundamental to their learning and development in the

course subject, this proposal can be supported by the existing literature such as Astin's similar suggestion in his content theory (1984). However, Saudi Arabian female students in this study added the exams element to this learning experience to be a monitor for their study and learning strategies. So, they link it to the grades as a performance measurement: where if they score high grades this means they did well with their study strategies and vice versa. Therefore, exams play an essential role that affect Saudi Arabian female students' learning experience as found in this study, in the part of students' independent study. Therefore, the exam element, proposed by students in this study, makes the suggested theoretical framework by this study different from the literature when compared to Neumann's and Astin's theory of learning experience. The use of exams and assessments as a benchmark measure has been found also within the literature (Chapter 2: point 2.4.6): as reported by James (1997), where students use their feedback to measure their performance and to plan future adjustments to their learning. Higgins (2000) and Pitts (2005) have also noticed how numerical grades affect the identity of students greatly, as their interpretation of these grades shows their capability as students.

In addition, Saudi Arabian students in this study found another use of exams: namely, as indicators of the lecture quality. For instance, if the questions in the exams reflect the lecture discussions or the information given by tutors, this means they had well planned and considered lectures and high scholarly, experienced tutors, whereas if students could not answer the exam questions, they would blame it on poor quality lectures and poor teaching ability. This, interestingly, presented the opposite norm of the existing literature, where usually tutors are assessing their new methods of exams by establishing studies surveying feedback from students, such as Gibbs and Simpson (2003 and 2004), but in this study, students are using exams to assess the tutors' lecturing performance, as an indicator of their academic ability.

Although the main purpose of exams is to assess the level of students' understanding of their subjects, in this study, in contrast, students believe exams have to repeat what has been explained during lectures or what has been written in their textbooks, otherwise it is not a good quality exam. Here, students of this study are trying to implement what they have been doing for the past twelve years of learning in general schools (which was to memorize the modules of the subjects studied and to repeat this

information in the tests), an issue which I think may reflect the students' resistance to a change in learning methods at a higher education level. I could argue here that students look at changing in their learning methods to be an uncomfortable process, which resembles human nature when facing new changes, as found in the existing literature (Paton and McCalman, 2008; Kotter, 1996). This is a matter that could explain the comfort feeling of Saudi students, in this study, with the ways they have always been used to: memorizing and repeating knowledge. To assist with this, a number of models have been developed in the literature to support the process of change management: such as Kotter (1996) who suggested an eight stages process for creating an effective organisational change, or the common example of ADKAR, an acronym that stands for awareness, desire, knowledge, ability and reinforcement. Whichever is the first level that does not apply to an organization, team, or individual is the first step to complete in helping them change (Bennett and Wayne, 2013). Therefore, in my opinion, organization's administrators could be managing this shift/change (in this PhD it is the study methods); consequently, the university's preparation courses and first year programs should introduce/ensure there is practice to acquire the required learning skills for higher education, as suggested in the literature (Smith 2004). On the other hand, the issue of the refusal by most students of this study to actively change their learning methods might be explained, in my opinion, by looking back to the cultural roots of studying the Qur'an, where students (named Kuttab: Chapter one, point 1.4.1) historically have been found to follow a method of memorizing holy texts and repeating them literally word by word, creating a generation of scholars who believe in one way of communication and learning. This tendency fundamentally contradicts the core of the learning purpose of modern day higher education, in my opinion, which demands the development of skills in critical thinking, constructive argument and learning to question the information that has been given, to build better understanding of the field studied, in other words, "to reason well in all matters, to reach out towards truth, and to grasp it." as the term "learning in higher education", defined in the existing literature (Newman, 1973).

Nevertheless, according to some researchers, it is the university's responsibility (Kotter, 1996) to guide and manage the changing process of students' learning skills from school level to undergraduate level. Aligning with the literature (Chapter 2: 2.4.3.3), which highlights that closing the gap between differences in skills required

for learning between transition from school to university is very important to improve students' learning experiences (Biith, 2001 and Smith 2004). This also, in my opinion, could be done by introducing ongoing optional workshops (once or twice a week) for all students to acquire and maintain the required skills pertaining to how to study and learn within an undergraduate course. The aim of my suggested workshops is to encourage students to discard their school method of learning which focuses on the memorizing subjects and to acquire a more investigative, self-directed form of learning (Appendix 23: under Recommendations: point 19).

Next are “modules”: which is the last aspect proposed by students in this study when defining the course subject. Modules and their relativity to the required subject and the novelty of the information of the given academic programme should make students curious to learn more, and capture their attention, in a manner which keeps them interested to learn and study more. Students in this study mentioned their study strategy of memorizing, but this strategy would be implemented only when they understand what the module is about. Therefore, if the modules offer new knowledge to the students and the quality of the course can satisfy students that would invite them to approach deep learning, which in the Saudi Arabian student definition is: understanding the topic, followed by memorizing. The quality of modules that satisfy Saudi Arabian students is the usefulness of the course work and having a module with clear structure and goals (Nibras/HR). However, when the same subjects have been retaken on other modules and just have the contents repeated at a more advanced level, that made students (Yosra and Haneen) not study at all or just skim the lecture notes as it was repeated information, which made their learning experience uninteresting at that point (surface learning approach). This approach to learning is a topic that has been confirmed in learning environment literature when it comes to the course's modules (Chapter 2: point 2.1.4.1), as the surface learning approach is executed when students are disappointed with the course quality (Diseth et al., 2010), are given an inappropriate amount of information (Svirko and Mellandy, 2008) or have an excessive workload on the module (Diseth et al., 2010).

Therefore, this is an urgent matter, in my opinion, which needs to be resolved by the universities' course facilitators to enhance the student learning experience. This could be done by revising and updating the modules. At the more advanced levels of the

course, the tutors could highlight the alteration in content in a given subject and illustrate how discussion of the topic has developed to this advanced level, as this issue could be a result of a lack of understanding by the students themselves, or it might be a real problem in the modules which need to be amended as soon as possible by the tutors.

The second component of the students' learning environment, which defines their learning experience, is "resources". In this study, students only included resources to the required textbooks and their availability, as they found textbooks to be the main source of the knowledge required for their courses, and it is the foundation of the information presented in the lectures, therefore, having a copy of the required textbooks will help students to study and to understand their subjects, which will then subsequently benefit them in performing better in the exams. In the existing literature, Cameron (1981) introduced resources to the student's learning development and experience as being the main contributor to learning outcome. However, the resources that Cameron suggested were: class sizes, libraries and computer research facilities (Chapter 2: point 2.3). Yet, in this study, female students found Cameron's suggestion to be highlighted under the physical settings of their university's learning environment, and these suggestions are nevertheless important to their learning process, as without them their learning would encounter challenges. Saudi Arabian students in this study stress the importance of their textbooks as the main learning resource, confirming Nijhuis's and his colleagues (2005) findings about the link between the availability of useful course textbooks and the deep learning approach found in the literature. Albeit the issue of textbook availability was raised by female students in this study, justifying their study methods based on lecture slides and summaries, they still found the textbooks of each subject to be crucial to their understanding and the successful achievement of deep learning. This issue can be traced back to studying Islamic orders from one holy book, the Qur'an, while Sunnah and Hadith references count fundamental sources too, always Muslims have to revise one book (Qur'an) for their religious beliefs (Chapter One, point 1.4.1). Hence, Saudi Arabian female students in this study elect textbooks for each subject to be the learning resource exclusively. The students would continue to use the library and computer for their assignments, but this has to be under the shadow of their textbooks to guide their research, as stated by students: Noor/MIS, for instance.

To summarize, according to the students in this study, the availability and uses of the university's learning environment settings (both pedagogical and physical), which are the university's course subjects (includes lectures, tutors, exams and modules) together with the availability of the required textbooks (resources) can ensure good performance during exams. However, female Saudi students in this study also stated that in order to achieve a good performance in exams a key additional factor needs to be added, which is the role of the student's independent study.

Considering the learning environment approach to the proposed theory, students' independent study categorized by the students in this study as part of the pedagogical learning environment (when student's characteristics are discussed) or as the personal learning network (when peers and collaborative learning are considered), however, all fall under the student learning environment. Nevertheless, in the existing literature, Neumann (1990) found that the role of students' independent study could contribute to the link between student learning experience and student learning outcomes (including student satisfaction and grades). Similarly, female Saudi students in this study illustrated the important role of their independent studies and indicated that without it they would not reach the required high grades or even a pass grade. However, I have noticed the different levels in appreciation of independent study between mature students and younger (Fresher) students. As mature students (such as Sara/MIS and Bashayer/HA) tended to commit more to their independent study and prefer it over group studies. Meanwhile, younger students (such as Nibras/HR) learn to study with their friends to exchange knowledge and lecture notes. Therefore, I think, the characteristics of particular students has a significant role in the students' learning approach, a point found in the existing literature (Chapter 2: point 2.1.4.1), as the more mature the student is, the more they are emotionally stable, and the more self-confident they are: the more they use the deep learning approach (Chamorro *et al.*, 2007; Chamorro *et al.*, 2009 and Wilson, 2009).

Thus, the newer and younger students in this study do not feel comfortable with the new subjects, field, or teaching methods, according to them, and so they tend to seek help and advice from their peers or the mature students (expert students). Hence, the role of peers appeared to be a major component in the learning experience of Saudi

female students and has been approached under the learning environment. Learning from and with peers is being recognized through many published educational studies for mutual learning between students (for example, Ertl and Wright, 2008 and Nestel and Kidd, 2005). However, among female Saudi students in this study, seeking help and advice from another student would not occur when a student was inexperienced or when the contact between student and the tutor/staff was declined or lost, according to them. Therefore, female students in this study believed that establishing social connection would help to rely on, and to be used as a resource of information since the relationship with their tutors only involves one-way communication (I think here that might be because of the culture where the adult person has to be respected by those who are younger and not to be interrupted or corrected, as a way of showing respect.). Consequently, Saudi female undergraduate students in this study claimed, besides using their textbooks, the creation of their own personal learning network environments, where they combine the formal and informal source of learning to trust, a matter that confirms the type of learning environment in the literature that highlights the importance of independent self-study (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Valtonen et al., 2012). Networking as a learning environment, according to the literature, can take place in different contexts, and also beyond constructed places as virtual spaces (such as social websites and apps) and can define this learning environment (Chapter 2: point 2.1.4.3). These established networks, according to students in this study, are between undergraduate students who are studying at the same university or have experienced similar modules. In addition, female students also implied that joining such networks usually starts with students who share similar study interests, then when the same students develop general knowledge about the university's regulations and have a sense of the requirements of the studied field, these network groups then got filtered to be with members who mostly share the same social and cultural background, besides similar study interests. Actually, networking for learning purposes has been confirmed through literature (Chapter 2: point 2.1.4.3) and has been found to have a positive influence on the student's learning experience (Trowler, 2010).

The tools that students use for establishing such vast networks across the university in this study start informally by introducing themselves to another through lectures, then exchange details to start launching social media networks using (WhatsApp group,

Facebook group, blogs, and Twitter) to promote collaborative learning between students. Using such tools confirmed what Eid and Al-Jabri (2016) established in the literature about the most commonly used social networking tools between students. However, WhatsApp remains the highest ranked tool for social networking in both studies (this PhD and Eid's and Al-Jabri's), but Facebook and YouTube rankings have been declining among female students' usage and Twitter seemed to be the second most popular social networking tool between female students in this PhD research. These differences in tools popularity might be affected by the gender preferences between students (as in this PhD the students are female, while in Eid's and Al-Jabri's study the students were males only) or possibly because in their surveys they used an old list of popular social networking tools, as there was no clear justification for their use of these certain tools to be ranked among their sampled students. Similarly, Alwagait and his colleagues (2015) found Twitter was the most popular tool for social networking between students, but they were not clear about their students' sample gender.

The use of technologies and online social networks to develop connection between students for learning, without eliminating other learning elements such as interaction with teachers and learning materials, has been established through literature too, and this process has been termed "Collaborative learning" (Dillenbourg *et al.*, 2009). Yet, in this study, the interaction with tutors occurred outside these networks and during lectures, according to students. In some cases, the tutor only made contact outside lectures with one elected student who represented her class group. That student would then become the mediator between the social network groups and the tutor (as stated by Haneen/PAD). In addition, these social learning groups are designed and facilitated by students themselves without official intervention by the university or tutors, unlike the common and established learning networks within literature such as Kraus's study (2006) (Chapter 2: point 2.4.1.3) that required the preconstruction and facilitation by tutors, managed and encouraged by the Higher Education institutions. This is, in my opinion, is a humble effort on the part of Saudi female students but represents an applicable solution to the lack of learning resources, academic advice and communication with tutors, as there is no platform established by the universities to connect all the students via instant messaging, according to students. Despite that official university forum exists to establish such network, but

the fact that such forum was not friendly for mobile usage, when compared with social media tools that students use for their learning, that may cause the unpopular use of the forum among students who preferred mobile application (App) that can be accessible anytime, anywhere, and compatible with their own smart devices, in my opinion. Accordingly, this could be one reason that university's forum is not popular among students in this research. It may also reflect on the fact that the university forum does not facilitate the exclusivity group membership which WhatsApp, for example, offers to its users. Therefore, I think that it might be useful to update the university forum to have a software application to improve the accessibility for students via their own smartphones. In addition, this rather unique female Saudi Arabian collaborative learning came about - without their tutors as facilitators to avoid getting in touch with students outside working hours - to combat the fact that students experience a serious lack of academic advice and have less access to a means to acquire academic skills. It might be argued also that tutors might fear that such a platform could burden them with the undue pressure of additional work tasks. This issue could be avoided by establishing "terms of use" to be produced by the tutors, which could state times for replying, the type of queries which are expected from students, as well as specifying what type of questions are not appropriate or acceptable.

Furthermore, such social learning groups invite and welcome students who have information that could impress their peers and who offer help during study tasks. This social motivation learning characteristic is common among students who join such groups, according to Vassileva (2008), but in Saudi Arabia, personal learning network environments, as illustrated by students in this research, start with all different types of students and then when students become older (learning mature), these groups get infiltrated according to the requirements: modern girls (only in Princess Nora university's case study) where one's appearance and clothes made a difference in being socially accepted), have to be an intelligent girl (the one who always or mostly score high grades) and/or have a strong connection with other groups of intelligent girls or boys, previous students (ex-students), or have a good relationship with the tutor. These requirements are determining the level of power and reliability of such groups and they are all based on trust as well as shared norms and values, making some of these groups in very high demand but not just anyone can join such a resourceful group (for example: Muradi's/DU and Noor's/MIS cases). Therefore,

within the massive learning social network that students create in this study, a group within a group can be established, and a student can end up joining a number of social groups to access learning resources. Consequently, these personal learning networks produce a solidarity attitude among students to face challenges (which are the limited learning resources as stated by students in this study) that could extend to include plagiarism or cheating in exams as a favour to one's group members. Some of those breaching the rules have been caught and penalized, while others have gone undercover (according to Nibras/HR and Dareen/Accounting). This solidarity and being loyal to friends, I consider, could be interpreted as a background of the original Bedouin tribes that obligate each member of them to be loyal to each other in all cases (Chapter 2: point 2.5.4) an issue that appeared in Khashan's study (1984) and both universities under this PhD study are aware of such matters. Hence, King Abdulaziz University has initiated awareness and acted retrospectively to encourage friends to help each other in learning and understanding by creating supportive classes, which are managed by students themselves (Sarah/MIS). However, the term "solidarity" in social groups has appeared in literature under the subject of social capital theory and female networking (Chapter 2: point 2.4.4.4), that women often appear to have group solidarity and a shared identity, brought about by mistreatment, discrimination, or uneven access to new information and resources (Franklin, 2005). Consequently, in this study, networking in Saudi is helping female learners to improve linkage bonds with other networks and capitalized on the resources of these external networks, but this contradicts Putman's theory (1995) of social capital as he argued that it is usually for minority women to have strong bonding with peers of their social network group. However, they often have a weak bridging link beyond their ethno-cultural community. Yet, the networking of Saudi students, in this PhD study, and their capitalizing beyond their immediate group is a learning process where women construct their knowledge from their interactions with social networks and links. This learning goes beyond the formal institution settings that take place in communities and virtually, or what Field (2005) called "adult learning". Although this networking benefits the students to widen their learning resources, I think the ties and norms, which grow within each group to maintain it, result in the elimination of unfit members (a limitation issue that has been confirmed by several studies, such as Franklin's (2005) and Portes's (1998)). These negative consequences can affect the main goal of overcoming the limited learning resources for Saudi female students.

Nevertheless, as the core reason for such social groups is what Saudi female students highlighted as good deeds, or what Adler and Kwon (2002) called, goodwill, which Saudi female students viewed as deciding their fate in the future tense of their existing lives. Therefore, I can argue that Saudi female students overcome the limitation of social capital by joining more than one group, to have membership in the expert's group, where they get benefits, and to master newly established groups where they transfer their experience and knowledge to younger members (inexperienced students), causing special types of social capital networking established among Saudi female undergraduate students.

To conclude the discussion of this approach, Saudi students have illustrated three types of learning environments that explain their learning experience in Saudi public universities: the pedagogical learning environment (tutors, lectures, learning approaches, subjects, resources and student's independent study) the physical settings of the learning environment, and networking as a personal learning environment (including a special kind of collaborative learning and unique social capital networks). In addition, "grades" are seen as an ultimate goal that most, if not all, Saudi Arabian students aim to achieve and have appeared in this approach to represent the master key that opens other personal learning goals (including satisfaction, securing future employment, or other goals). However, this approach has clearly stated the role of 'achieving high grades via exams' in the student learning journey is a measuring tool for quality to assess the method of student's study strategy and also to assess tutors' scholarly expertise in transforming knowledge for students, using the measure of tutors' instructional abilities. If they achieve high grades, this implies that they have chosen a suitable study strategy (textbook or lecture slides or maybe reading summaries) and that their tutor's lectures are satisfying. However, the issue of believing in scoring high grades will be discussed in more detail next.

5.2.2 The influence of religion, culture and family values

The Saudi Arabian cultural influence has been evidenced thus far, as it presented previously to explain subject textbooks as one fundamental resource for students and the one-way communication with tutors: all rooted in Saudi Arabian culture. However, to understand this approach, defining key terms is essential to build this

case: religion, culture and family values. Constructing my understanding from interviewing students: religion is what all Saudi Arabians agree on as commands and order (praying five times a day, for instance and that Muslim females should appear modest in public places), culture, however, is where the people of a city agree on some behaviour and it can be different from one city to another (wearing a Burqa, for example, or just a veil to cover hair), family values are where a family (contains father, mother and brothers) beliefs, and in some cases the tribe's beliefs are considered as family values that have to be respected by females as students because they carry the family name and have to represent their tribe's values). These values are different from one family to another within one city (some of the families, for example, are prepared to let their daughters go out with their friend to study outside the university operating time, while others do not allow their daughter to conduct any learning tasks outside the university and do not allow their daughters to meet their friends outside university for a study group, for example) according to Manahel/Accountant and Masha'el/Economics.

This important factor is shaping the students' learning experience in Saudi Arabia and justifying some actions that students have to undertake, based on these beliefs, as Hamdan (2014) confirmed in her study in that culture still challenges some students in their learning methods, but it produces mature students skilled in dealing with such challenges, an identity that will be discussed later in the following point (5.2.3). Culture influence arises from the first task of the daily learning journey: namely, transportation. Some students, in this study, cannot commute to the university with their friends sharing the same car and driver, as some families are over protecting their females when it comes to their daughters and, therefore, only a male relative (guardian) is allowed to drive their cars and the driver can only be one of the following: father, brother or husband (the case of Sita). However, other students have semi-free choices to choose to go with a known friend (family has to know this female friend who is trustworthy) and can share the same car, which may be driven by a non-relative driver (private driver who has been employed by friend's family), as is the case for Sarah. Families here are having a higher position and power (or what Deakin and Sulkowski (2007) called vertical power) when it comes to their daughters' freedom. This power is not negotiable, and daughters are expected to obey; otherwise they will be forbidden from higher education (according to Noor). However, during

interview analysis, I noticed that the same students who have the family's higher position background with their transportation issues are the same students who faced/are facing issues in their placements, as they are not permitted to work in a mixed gender environment because of their family values, which in turn will affect the choice for their future jobs, confirming the link that Deakin and Sulkowski (2007) found, in the literature, between the power position of the family and the influence exerted over a student's career. I found only three such cases, but further quantitative investigation to this correlation needs to be established within a much larger sample, to support such a claim in the Saudi Arabian context.

In addition, family values affect the personal learning environment of the student: explaining why some students are permitted to meet their friend outside university to study while others may not, while another student can talk to their male peers whereas some female students may not. These same family's values are affecting female students in their learning behaviour as well: as in lectures students explain, in this study, why some of them cannot interact or interfere with their female tutors: as they have been raised and grew up in families where objecting or negotiating older (in age) opinion is a sign of a badly behaved person. This issue has been confirmed in the literature (Deakin and Sulkowski's, 2007; Newell, 1999 and Chan, 1999) as students from a high power background, would not ask for help, prefer a didactic type of teaching and tend to avoid presenting their opinions openly.

However, both family values and Saudi Arabian cultural influences are affecting students' behaviour in class when it comes to a lecture with a male tutor. The ego of the male tutor must be respected in Saudi culture, as I understand from the students, and males are holding the provider position in any Saudi family, plus dominating the most powerful position in Saudi Arabian society where they make decisions on behalf of their families. Therefore, male tutors have a respected role and cannot be objected to or challenged on their opinion/or information provided during lectures. Bashayer has an experience of having lower grades because of this and Sarah has a friend who scored Grade C, because she challenged her male tutor's opinion in her essay. Yet, those incidents reflected what Bashayer and Sarah feel but cannot be related to other students, as they may have a different interpretation.

Additionally, grades appeared again in this approach according to students in this study: as grades are a measuring tool for families, also, to assist their daughters' academic performance. As at school level, high grades indicate excellent student performance, which, in turn, reflects the family status in the society, or what Ho (1993) called: a matter of saving family face.

Nevertheless, when female students found themselves with limited access to learning resources, they have established their social network groups (as discussed in the previous point) and that made them feel challenged by their society, which favour male students over females (evidenced through students' thoughts of male learning resources, and the availability of more options to pick from for fields of study for male students). Therefore, female students, in this study, feel that when they score high grades (higher than male students) they will prove to Saudi Arabian society that they have an ability to learn that is not only equal to that of men but also better in many cases, by scoring higher grades than men. As a student expressed, they hoped this would also help them regain their respected position in the Saudi Arabian community.

Finally, although Islamic orders - the official religion practiced in Saudi Arabia - have not affected the learning experience directly, these orders have, however, shaped Saudi Arabian cultural and family values. For example, in Islamic scripture, it is forbidden for a man (who is not a guardian for that woman) to be alone with a woman in a closed room, hence, that order has shaped the Saudi Arabian culture to not accept mixed gender communities. Therefore, Saudi Arabia has sex segregated university campuses for each gender. Similarly, the family values have been formed under this order: some families would allow their females to use transportation (cars) that have been driven by an employed driver (a man who is not a guardian), while other families do not allow such a practice. As a result, this type of culture, which I would term as Saudi Islamic culture, is a major influence, affecting the female learning experience under the umbrella of Islam requirements.

In conclusion, regarding this approach, family, culture and religious environments are not experienced solely at the student's home, but extend outside the home, affecting all aspects of higher education, according to students in this study, an issue which has

to be considered by university regulators when it comes to encouraging students to do more in their learning: such as asking students to volunteer outside university or contacting a firm to gather information for an assignment. I would suggest that possibly the university and the Ministry of Education need to educate families more about the role of learning and how increased learning would improve their daughters and help them to be better people, thereby creating a better society and a better future for the country as a whole. Possibly, if the gap between culture and learning requirement could be successfully bridged, it might increase the overall level of Saudi Arabian higher education. Although, historically (Hamdan, 2005) Higher Education initiated efforts to gain families trust to let their daughters commit to learning outside the home by placing rules to restrict female mobility and that eventually resulted in having an educated female generation. However, I think, currently, Saudi Arabian female demands might have been changed and the quality level of higher education is in the process of improving and developing (Chapter 2: under the point 2.5.5). Therefore, I would recommend possibly another attempt to gain families' trust is needed in this millennium, but in favour of females. Although Saudi females in this study attempted to prove worthy of their access to learning in Higher Education to their society by scoring high grades in their academic performance, the next approach will trace the behaviour of Saudi Arabian female students in their learning journey in favour of their society.

5.2.3 Students' behaviour and identity

It is the process where students adjust from the passive role to active, engaged and powerful roles between lectures and social groups, between the university campus and at home with family. This identity and role playing is where students construct their learning process: it is emergent, involving opportunities to participate in the practice of learning in each community, as well as the development of an identity which provides a sense of belonging and commitment to each environment (Blacker, 1995). Identity construction, participation and practice are all the core concepts of *situated learning theory* (Lave and Wenger, 1991): as knowledge is not abstract and symbolic, but is mediated, provisional and socially constructed (ibid, p.53).

Student participation in each setting (lectures, campus or at home) is the core to developing both identities in these settings and developing their learning practice as permitted in the existing literature (Handley *et al.*, 2006). However, participation does not only require physical activities, it includes both taking part (action) and connection with peers (Wenger, 1998) and, of course, the level of participation differs between new students and mature students at university, according to the literature (*ibid.*, 2006). According to participants in this study, new students who have joined the university would allow limited participation in the university setting only to learn and observe how the new community of higher education functions in such a university, confirming Barnawi's findings in his research (2009) that Saudi students at the beginning of their identity formation, and to feel accepted in new community of classroom, stayed in the background and avoided discussion tasks.

Next stage then as I found in this PhD results, female students may try to ask limited friends in the same class to find answers to the type of participation required before building their own connections within the personal learning environment or building their own experience knowledge. Therefore, through these processes, students come to hold or reject opportunities to participate more in each setting depending on the 'acceptance' of those opportunities within their current sense of self. As the *identity* of the student develops through their learning experience journey they derive to understand who they are and in which part of a given social group they belong and are accepted, similar results found in Count's and Willmott's research (2003). Students in this study, also derive to understand and appreciate what the limit of their freedom to practice learning activities is within their family traditions and their own community values. Consequently, students in this research, experience the broader social and power relations affecting their learning experience journey. Hence, when students develop their identity and start to participate in each setting, they then adapt to practice the learning and study tasks in each group of students (peers or friends). Such practice of learning among students interdependently was argued by Orsmond and Merry (2017) in their article; they debated that most of the learning occurred outside the overt curriculum as students appear to be participating in communities of practice and learning networks, where sense making arises through negotiation and there is identity development (Orsmond and Merry, 2017). Here, I would be in agreement with Orsmond's and Merry's (2017) suggestion that educators in Saudi Arabia might be better if they placed their efforts on developing students' ability to self-assess and

to effectively negotiate information, instead of mainly depending on their own delivery of the curriculum content and feedback. This suggestion was positively highlighted in O'Donovan's (2018) study. From his in-depth interviews with 10 students (who were in their third year of an undergraduate course and doing their work placement), evidence of two-way learning emerged between students and their work colleagues in the work place, as the work environment and management support opportunities were facilitated for knowledge and skills transfer. This qualitative research highlights the importance for educators, in Saudi also, to develop a learning environment, similar to that in the work place, which can support new students to contribute to the learning practice with the support of curriculum design that could help participation of new members in community of practice (O'Donovan, 2018).

Although Saudi students in this study can reach a level of creating a social group for learning and controlling who can be in and out, these students (girls) still have to go to the first stage of identity as a beginner student (the observant stage without interfering with other groups of learning practice) as that is what they are expected to do as women in Saudi Arabia according to participants in this study (such as in lectures where an older tutor must be respected, or when they come across a male social learning group, where they have to be in a lower position to be accepted by this group, so they can gain the required information or academic advice). This special identity formation is the center of this PhD proposed theoretical framework as it enables the female students to find their way to overcome both cultural and social barriers.

Finally, this role of the student's identity is the core connecting all of the previous approaches of learning experience together. Some of these approaches are given facts according to participants (that students cannot remove or ignore) includes: Saudi Islamic culture and the university's input, course subjects, resources and peer pressure. However, creating social groups and networking are variables that Saudi female students in this study can freely join or exit. In order to understand and overcome some of the limited options through those given facts, students create these social groups to discuss other available options and make decisions based on them. However, the unique identity which students develop through their learning experience is to make sense of shifting between roles that Saudi Islamic culture

imposes and the social group requires, in order to finally achieve the required goal, namely high grades.

However, combining different approaches to develop a theoretical framework that defines learning experience has been accomplished in literature (from Astin's proposed theory (1984) and Neumann's theory (1996)), yet, this PhD's theoretical proposed framework has added unique approaches to define the female learning experience:

- Learning environments that include: pedagogical, physical and personal learning network, all as types of environments that students go through on their learning journey.
- Saudi Islamic culture that justifies students' and families' decisions.
- The role of student identity as learners, and the ability to shift between roles to fit within different situations without breaching religious or cultural beliefs.

These approaches are proposing a distinctive definition of the Saudi Arabian learning experience and are making Saudi Arabian females learning journey unique compared to any current learning experience within the literature. Within these approaches that proposed theoretical framework: the answers to the main research questions are to be found. These answers are only reviewed and extracted from students who participated in this study. None of the answers represented the researcher's opinion.

5.3 Saudi Arabian women's' goals within higher education: the answer to the first question (Q1. What are Saudi Arabian women's goals within higher education?)

It is the highest grades/GPA that female students are aiming for through their learning experience, according to most answers in both interviews and questionnaires. To redeem their position as valuable women in Saudi Arabian society they enroll in universities (higher education institutions) where male students usually get social credits when they graduate. Therefore, women are trying to exceed men by achieving higher grades to prove that they are similar to or better than male students.

Although this study came across several student learning objectives, such as self-satisfaction, family satisfaction, to obtain a decent job, to guarantee the undergraduate degree, to secure the future and to serve the community, despite the disparity in objectives of learning from one student to another, all the participants agreed that the key goal to help achieve their future desires was to get high scores (grades) and a high GPA.

However, as it has become difficult to memorize the massive amount of books at university level, students reach the conclusion that it is impossible to reach the full mark by following the same study method, while the society around some of these students still expects them to score this (100%). As a result, it is reflected in students' demands for having fewer materials to study from (to memorize). Maybe these demands fundamentally came from the family themselves as there was a high percentage of participants having both or one of their parents qualified at diploma or high school level: a level where students have been traditionally expected to score 100%, and this experience has been reflected in their daughters who have become university students (different education level).

Another reason for achieving the highest grades is, as Yosra (with both parents qualified at Bachelor level) stated, that she has never had a problem with her family because of her grades, but she always tries her best to achieve the highest possible grades anyway because of the huge number of graduates compared to the limited job offers available in the labour market, which results in considerable job competition (Nibras), which creates a fear of being deprived of having a successful future career. Therefore, students, while they can, have to score that high GPA to overcome one part of that competition in applying for a job in the future (after graduation). Yet, Nibras does not believe that high grades are the key element in having a career, but she is still careful to score high grades to guarantee priority at employment entry. On the other hand, Noor thinks that such behaviour has been found among students who could not join their desired school or field of study, so they have such a reaction of social revenge and to prove themselves worthy as students.

Nevertheless, the emerging issue of cheating has occurred because of the pressure to achieve high grades as a society requirement. These issues have not been covered in Khashan's study (1984), as it was only male students being investigated and at that time (the 80s) university learning was only considered as a means to achieve rapid prosperity.

However, identifying the needs of students during their learning experience and trying to provide the required environment for them is what the literature called "collaborative learning" according to Dillenbourg, Jarvela and Fischer (2009), and this is what King Abdul Aziz is implementing as a solution to the issue.

To summarize, this study came across numerous student learning objectives and revealed the key goal to accomplish these future plans: to score the highest grades. None of these learning goals was for getting married: a goal which was suggested by Tjomsland (2009) to explain the quality of Saudi Arabian female higher education.

5.4 Saudi Arabian women's personal learning environments within higher education in Saudi Arabia: the answer to the second question (Q2.

What kind of personal learning environments do women experience in higher education in Saudi Arabia?)

During their learning journey, Saudi Arabian female students came across different types of learning environments that include: pedagogical, physical and personal learning networks. A personal learning network is the fundamental of women's personal learning environments, as they form their social groups using social websites or face-to-face connections. However, within these groups, a unique collaborative learning appears to be exclusive to Saudi Arabia, as it has been constructed without tutors' initiative or design (revise point 5.2.1 of this chapter). It has been argued that it is through participation in a community (this social group) that individuals (students) develop their practices and identities. Then the notion of 'community of practice' can be explained as the students are likely to participate in multiple groups during their academic term - each with distinct practices and identity structures - making

individuals negotiate their place within those social groups (revise point 5.2.3 of this chapter).

Personal learning networks in this PhD study have been found by students themselves, without the help of the university, as they go and create such a vast connection as a result of the lack of learning resources. Students create their own connection platforms: friends of friends, or joining social media groups, such as WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram to connect to as many students as they can. With this connection they can trade information for another piece (the same reason that Vassileva found in her study to explain the engagement of students in collaborative learning (2008)), or as a good deed (prayers or Dua'a) and having a good reputation at university between students.

As a result, the personal learning environment that students experience in Saudi Arabia during their learning is the social networking based on technology facilitated by students themselves, which in turn contributes to the students' identity development.

5.5 Learning obstacles that female Saudi Arabian students encounter: the answer to the third question (Q3. What are the obstacles that female Saudi Arabian undergraduate students encounter during their learning journey?).

Students talked about limited facilities at the university compared to on the male campus being a barrier but not all of them considered it to be a massive problem, as they articulated that they “would not mind coming to a tent to have lectures or to a fancy castle” (as stated by Noor), as they want to learn no matter what the physical setting. They argued that they have to prove to their society that they can achieve knowledge and be educated at the same level as male students and, indeed, that they can do better. Therefore, the main learning obstacle for women is equality with men in terms of learning resources and university opening times. These cultural obstacles may have created considerable courage in young females to prove that they can be educated with or without the support of their communities. They demonstrated their

courage by breaching the common cultural value of not talking or connecting to males, but the need for information and learning resources gave them the courage to break that value undercover by using social websites to protect their identity (keeping identity hidden by using fake names) and to be clear that the purpose of such communication is purely for learning. (See Nibras and her Facebook hunt for male student.)

However, the limited facilities can be narrowed to include the learning environment as a pedagogical approach, namely course subject, which is the real struggle for Saudi Arabian girls (according to their responses in both questionnaires and interviews: a total of 191 responses out of 274). Confirming this proposed theory, Saudi Arabian students find the given facts of university learning cannot be altered, and, therefore, they have created their own learning networks that help them to overcome such learning barriers. Nevertheless, the most common learning obstacles are as follows (note that these obstacles are factors under the course subject):

Table 5.1: Most common learning obstacles that female students face in their learning.

Order	Obstacle themes	Details of obstacles	Total responses	
			Numbers	Percentage
1	Requirements of specialized field	Unwanted field of study, transfer between field of studies or limited field of study to enroll in.	21 out of 191	11%
2	Lack of academic advice	No academic advice program from staff, unskilled tutors/lack of expertise, or knowledge gap between students and their tutors.	20 out of 191	10.5%
3	Communication gap	1- Student-staff communication: impoliteness, rude responses, careless with regards to students' needs, or uncooperative. 2- Student-tutor communication: no email responses, no response outside lectures, or not accepting different	14 out of 191	7.3%

		opinions.		
4	Technical issues	Weak signals in CCTV lectures, weakness in Wi-Fi-connection, system errors in students' university accounts, system errors during first week of each semester preventing students from fixing their term's schedules, blocking some websites inside campus: YouTube, projector errors inside classes, limited computer facilities, difficulties in using printers inside campus, unavailability of soft copies (Pdf. format) of required textbox.	13 out of 191	6.8%
5	English language	Lack of English skills from school level.	12 out of 191	6.3%
6	More than one obstacle	More than one of the above obstacles.	8 out of 191	4.2%

5.6 Saudi Arabian women's description of their learning experience in Saudi Arabian higher education: the answer to the fourth question (Q4.

How do women describe their learning experience in Saudi Arabian higher education?)

The inequality of learning assets compared to males and the power position of gender in Saudi Arabian society all placed female students in a position of disadvantage as students. This marked in-group solidarity and a shared identity brought about exclusion from the key civic roles and hierarchical positions. This produces a social capital among female students to address life's daily challenges, women's empowerment and rights.

It is connected to the culture and background with the knowledge of shifting roles between the 4 settings (lectures, university campus, family home and within social

groups). Through these acts, students are tacitly coordinated. These acts do not correspond to Islamic and Saudi Arabian culture: such shifting power relations in a context of competing official discourse: between religious values, Islamic awakening and current learning resources disorganisation, allows the reinforcement of “us” between female students through the emergence of norms of behaviour and self-presentation on campus with repeated high grades, which differentiate them from other types of students (the rural ones, the dummy and thick-headed: all wording taken from the students’ transcripts) and to beat their male peers with their accomplishment of higher grades.

Paula Fass (1980) has a somewhat comparable case study (in the USA): female students began smoking in public as a revenge reaction to gender inequality and degrading, something done previously only by “bad” women, at the same time as society’s forgiveness to men when conducting the same action. Yet, in this PhD case in Arabia Saudi, talking to men to reach learning goals, is a type of talking back to power; by establishing their own space and allowing only specific types of students to enter such a platform (norm and requirements): has to be clever, helpful with her information, open-minded with a good appearance (only in Riyadh), always scoring high grades, and not disappearing all term and only showing up on exam night. All of these requirements are applied to male peers as well to enter such a social group. However, in this case females are in control of this virtual society.

Therefore, the core of this research is the answer to this fourth question: those young Saudi Arabian females are shaping social network groups, by inventing creative ways to talk back to power, while maintaining respect for their culture and religious beliefs.

5.7 Suggestions for improving female Saudi Arabian students’ learning experience: the answer to the fifth question (Q5. What would Saudi Arabian female students suggest to improve their learning experience?)

Students suggested the need to be in an equal position to men. As students in higher education institutions they need open access and to be able to take similar subjects to men, plus they need stronger course content compared to the existed status quo. In

addition, female students need to secure their empowerment position and not be challenged, as they need the chance to demonstrate that they are trustworthy as they represent half of the Saudi Arabian community.

However, the suggested education facilities can be summarized to include improving the current learning environment as a pedagogical approach, all suggested by female participants (according to students' responses in both questionnaires and interviews: 150 responses out of a total of 274) are as follows:

Table 5.2: Most frequently suggested themes to improve Saudi Arabian female learning experience.

Order	Themes of suggestions	Details of suggestions	Total responses	
			Numbers	Percentage
1	Subject skills training and applying real cases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Linking subjects to real business cases and practice. -Improve modules to reach the level of male curriculum. -Support lectures with practice, examples and field trips. -Apply scientific discussions during lectures and group work. -Apply problem-based learning as a teaching method. 	52 out of 150	35%
2	Encourage the use of technology tools within university.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Tutors need to be trained and skilled to use such technology. - Collaborative learning with tutor - contact via social media. - Provide e-learning tools, so students can log into CCVT from the comfort of their own homes. -Training tutors to officially use the CCTV tools. 	20 out of 150	13.33%
3	Implement more methods to support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recruit female assistants to support male tutors to offer help to students, as 	12 out of 150	8%

Order	Themes of suggestions	Details of suggestions	Total responses	
			Numbers	Percentage
	students' learning and better understanding of their subjects.	they cannot access the male's office in the event of queries. -Record CCTV lectures and make them available online as a learning resource to use later.		
4	Open more universities to accommodate the massive number of students.	-Open new universities to accommodate the large number of students: with modern facilities and design. -Provide opportunities for students to choose the required field of study. -Add more specialized fields of study similar to that offered to males.	7 out of 150	5%
5	Allow optional workshops related to female students' course subjects.	- To practice more to enable competence.	7 out of 150	5%
6	Train employees to practice good behaviour.	- Both administrative staff and tutors.	7 out of 150	5%
7	More than one suggestion.	More than one of the above suggestions.	15 out of 150	10%

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter started by proposing a theoretical framework that explained the findings of this PhD study. It suggested that learning experience is about the students' perceptions of educational inputs they receive from their university and Saudi Arabian society as a whole. Education inputs from their university mean: the university's educational course in terms of: [subjects (lectures and tutors, exams, and modules), resources (required text books) and the role of independent student study], in addition to the existence of peers (other students within the university) who come across the learning journey. Saudi Arabian society's educational input mean: the values of students' families, cultural and religious beliefs which all shape and direct this learning experience.

Subsequently, it moved to discuss the main theoretical approaches that this framework has integrated: learning environments, Saudi Arabian Islamic culture and the role of students' identity as learners, making Saudi Arabian females learning experience unique compared to any current learning journey within the literature.

Nevertheless, it has been mentioned within the answer to Question 4 that the core of this PhD research is that young Saudi Arabian women are inventing creative ways to talk back to power, using their social networks as a tool, while keeping respect for their Saudi Arabian Islamic cultural beliefs. The next chapter will explain this primary conclusion and suggest future research to confirm such an answer.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is about implementing the proposed theoretical framework of learning experience to the practicable world and to interpret its originality amongst the current literature. The chapter also considers my final critical reflection on the research journey and the impact I had on the study. Finally, the study's original contribution to the knowledge base of learning experience is discussed and the implications of the findings for practice, education and further research are outlined.

6.2 Summary of the study

The quality of learning in Saudi Arabian higher education may have been affected by the ranking of Saudi Arabian universities on a global scale (Alshayea, 2012) as none of the Saudi Arabian universities were listed within the 392 leading educational institutions in the World. Since some Saudi Arabian universities ranked 199th and lower (in Webometrics and the Times Higher Education-Quacquarelli Symonds Survey (THE-QS)), according to a report by Mine Paristech (2011), this low performance level resulted in a reform project for Higher Education procedures which is still in progress and is, consequently, supervised by a high level committee, consisting of academics, experts (local and expats) and members of the Government Council (Shoura) (Altamimi, 2011). Yet, the voice of students (especially female students) and their opinions remains concealed and not reported scientifically. Therefore, this PhD study focused on the female undergraduate students' point of view on the learning experience and discusses their learning journey in order to propose points and issues that may influence and help with the improvement process for female education, in Business fields, and throughout Higher Education in general.

The interest in the student learning experience within literature has various roots: one is the escalation of student numbers and the growth in the quantities and forms of higher education institutions since the 1960s that affected the structure of the student body and the institutional setting (Trow, 2006). Also, it can be traced back to the growing market competition between universities (Ertl et al. 2009), but more

importantly the term 'student learning experience' has been identified as the core of the British Higher Education mission (HEA, 2005). Yet, the definition of the term 'Student learning experience' has not been clearly identified, although the uses of e-learning, strategies of retention, the development of university capabilities and the support for research facilities have been among the many areas to be included in studying the student learning experience. However, when following the academic research in this subject it can be found that the term 'student learning experience' has evolved from theories pertaining to approaches to learning (late 70s), to reach a theory that highlighted the importance of using students' perspectives to accomplish quality assurance in higher education (early 2000). These separate proposed theories covered learning environments, teaching environments, student behavior and identity, communities of practice, academic cultures and disciplinary identities, or combined theories: as in Neumann's studies which combined three theories (content, resources and flexible learning) to enhance student learning and development output which resulted in the inception of the term 'Quality of learning experience'. Moreover, most of these research bases were statistically analysed and were not performed with a deeper level of analysis, as most of them were aiming to establish links between the various factors, the learning process and learning outcomes. Consequently, this PhD study was extremely focused on the learning experience constructed by the students themselves with open-ended interview questions which allowed students to describe and represent their learning journey freely and to structure all the variables they encountered via this unique experience to lead this study towards proposing a learning experience theoretical framework to add to the body of existing knowledge (Figure 6.1).

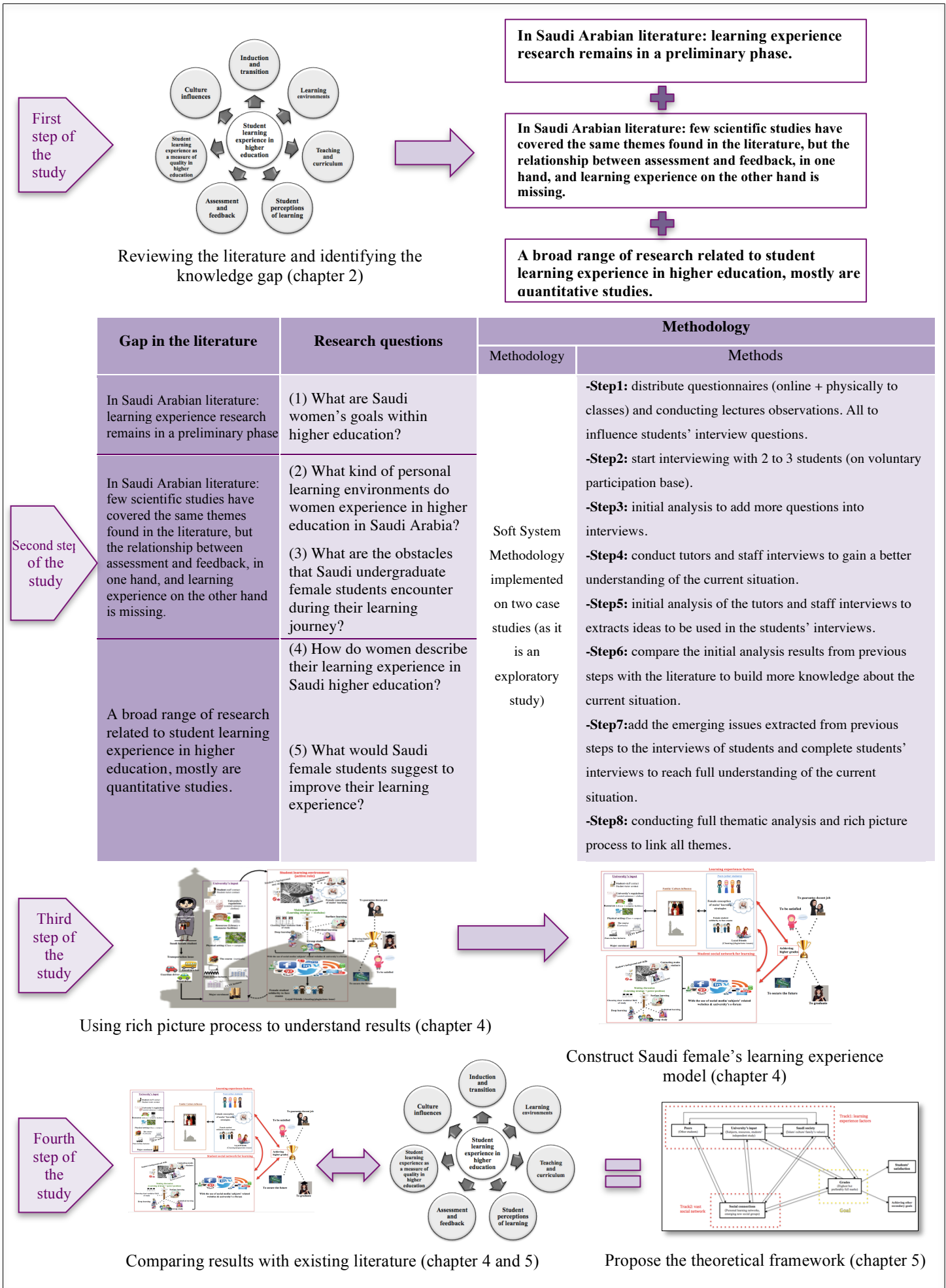


Fig.6.1: Summary of the PhD study

Figure 6.1 shows the summary of this PhD study that started by reviewing the literature related to learning experience to build a general understanding about this field and to identify the knowledge gaps that this study could try to fill by establishing research questions based on these knowledge gaps (Chapter 2). Then, this study moved to frame students' interview questions based on the literature to explore new cases in Saudi Arabia (Riyadh and Jeddah). Next, the fieldwork and data collection were started with questionnaire distribution, aimed at students of the Business School for participation (online and in classes) to gain more understanding about the situation studied and to add depth to the questions used in the student interviews, based on issues raised and the answers to these questionnaires. In addition, the researcher started interviewing some students (3 from Riyadh and 2 from Jeddah) to gather more knowledge about the Saudi Arabian female students' learning experience (Chapter 3: justification of these methods). Moreover, the researcher interviewed university staff and tutors to build a clearer image of the situation and to add more questions to the student interviews. Then, from the initial analysis to data of: observations, questionnaires, staff and tutor interviews, and the first students interviews in both cases (3 from Riyadh and 2 from Jeddah); the researcher obtained greater knowledge and in-depth questions to investigate with students during their interviews. Moreover, in each step of the fieldwork, the researcher went back to the literature whenever a new subject or an issue occurred. Therefore, the final literature review has reached seven themes. Afterwards, a thematic analysis was conducted on the transcripts of the student interviews, followed by a Soft System Methodology approach to build the rich picture of the situation that helped the researcher to connect between themes and then to build a learning experience model (Chapter 4). Finally, comparing the model to the existing literature led to the final proposed theoretical framework (Chapter 5) which pointed to the final conclusion, as follows.

6.3 Overall conclusion

Saudi Arabian female students are trying hard to prove their worth to the Saudi community, although they remain bound to several cultural and religious beliefs. This status quo can be implemented positively to improve the level of Saudi Arabian Higher Education. As Saudi Arabian female students, with their eagerness, passion

and motivation, they could help build valuable foundations to raise the position of Saudi Arabian Higher Education.

Consequently, the Saudi Arabian student learning experience model proposed a unique learning experience theoretical framework that captures the daily life of Saudi Arabian students where learning is a complicated process of combining social, cultural and behavioural issues as well as self-understanding for the field studied. Therefore, the proposed theoretical framework combines three approaches pertaining to learning experience: learning settings and personal learning environments, the influence of religion, culture and family values, and finally, student behaviour and identity. Moreover, the proposed theoretical framework also added a new perspective to the concept of learning experience to suit the special case of Saudi Arabia: the influence of Islam on students' daily life, the ultimate goal (outcome) of the whole learning experience journey was achieving full marks, if possible, or the highest grades, and shifting the power position of females as students during their learning journey to compliment the requirements of society. Subsequently, the behaviour of students during their learning experience (changing identity between family, lectures, university staff and their peers) was the core of this proposed theory. Students implemented this behavioural role to overcome any learning obstacles they may encounter during their journey.

These findings provided insights into the meaning of Saudi Arabian undergraduate female students learning experience as the entire purpose of such an experience was to establish that Saudi Arabian women can learn and overcome any social barrier to demonstrate their worth in their society and can even exceed their male counterparts. These results might indicate the abundant energy these female students possess which, in turn, could have a positive impact on both: them and their wider society. Consequently, educators and assigned people that are responsible for quality in Saudi Higher Education should attend to such findings and be encouraged to recognise the students' voice.

The proposed theoretical framework that was developed through this study has implications for academia as well. These include the quality of teaching and tutor instruction ability, assessment methods, bridging the gap between school level and

undergraduate level at Business School and minimizing the knowledge gap between students and their tutors. This may encourage improvement in Business curricula development, educate and equip students with the skills required for university, and may increase motivation to further develop higher education in Saudi Arabia.

6.4 Strengths and limitations of the study

6.4.1 Strength of this PhD study

The originality of this study is not based on the results only; it rather extends its strength to include the novelty of its methodology. Using soft system methodology to investigate and explore new situations has helped to construct a deeper understanding of the complex daily activities. In addition, it is the first study, to date, in the field of learning experience which implemented this methodology in its development process to map the daily activities of learning and to draw connections between procedures which fundamentally contributed to the establishment of the proposed theoretical context.

Moreover, it is the first study in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East in general to explore several populations in one study (mainly students) in the field of the female learning experience. Also, this study identified gaps in knowledge in Saudi Arabian capital, and the impact of gaining some rights, such as allowing women to drive, on the female learning experience. Additionally, the significance of this study would not only be applicable to Saudi Arabia, it could help many decision-makers around the world at the higher education level to understand the educational background of overseas female students who come from such restricted, religious and traditional countries as Saudi Arabia. This research could help to recognize the required skills and courses that these female students should attain/complete before enrolling in universities in developed countries, be they European, British or American universities.

6.4.2 Limitation of this PhD study

There were also some limitations encountered in this study. This research exclusively investigated two universities in two places at a particular time. Also, I am not in a position to contradict the students' derived data, as this would not be true to my methodology (epistemology). The major focus of this thesis has been the student voice.

The research did not include the part-time students' experience or the private sector universities. It also excluded other fields of study and other colleges such as: Science College, Computer College, Medical College, Art College and Humanities College. Additionally, this study did not investigate the teaching/tutoring experience, which could provide an insight for the proposed theoretical framework. However, due to the time constraints of this PhD study, it was not possible for such an expansion to be considered at this stage, but it could certainly be undertaken in future research work.

The sampling method used in this study was volunteer sampling. In this case, one has to be very cautious in making any claims for generalizability or representativeness, as volunteers may have a range of different motives for volunteering, e.g. wanting to help a friend, interest in the research, wanting to benefit society, an opportunity for revenge on a particular school or head teacher. Volunteers may be well intentioned, but they do not necessarily represent the wider population, and this would have to be made clear (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p.160). Similarly, this study did not include all Saudi Arabian public universities. It only includes two universities: one in Jeddah and another in Riyadh. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized or applied to Saudi Arabia as a whole.

In addition, only three students (all from Jeddah) have conducted their interviews via telephone calls, upon their request, as they could not afford to waste time during the daytime, as they needed to revise for their exams according to their statements. This method of interviewing might have affected the results, as the researcher was not able to observe the interviewees' facial expressions and therefore might have overlooked some issues that could have been investigated in depth. Moreover, this study did not include the security staffs' insights pertaining to the student learning experience,

which could have explained their opinions about the current regulations and maintaining family trust in order to ensure that they send daughters to university.

6.5 Recommendations

Since Saudi Arabian women are highly motivated to learn in universities to earn an undergraduate qualification to prove their worthiness to Saudi Arabian society, this finding could be utilized to increase the level of higher education. Granting Saudi Arabian female undergraduate students their demands to improve their learning experiences (Chapter 5: 5.7: students' suggestions), mainly improving their learning environment pedagogically: such as extending the library's opening hours, updating the Business Modules and improving the conditions of university facilities, would strengthen the trust between the Saudi Arabian female students and the Ministry of Education and that, in turn, would reflect on their performance in learning positively, which could increase the level of Saudi Arabian higher education compared to international university levels, a specified aim, which Saudi Arabian Higher Education began to achieve 9 years ago, yet without any clear results. Therefore, considering Saudi Arabian females' learning experience in their program for reforming Higher Education may help the Ministry of Education to accomplish the proposed improvement in levels attained.

Gender equality should be improved at the undergraduate level in Saudi Arabia, regardless of the field of study, but with particular emphasis on the curricula and methods of assessment. This matter would not only stabilize female students emotionally, it would also motivate them further to secure their position in Saudi Arabian society by performing at a similar level or higher than male students. In turn, this suggestion could impact positively on the level of Saudi Arabian higher education.

Although the proposed suggestions previously were based on the results of this study (based on two public universities from two cities), a national study would be recommended to better understand female students' learning experience and in order to draw up a national plan to improve their learning process. Therefore, data could be

collected from major cities in Saudi Arabia, analyzed and triangulated to find similarities and differences in order to reach a unified National Plan.

Moreover, it is important to conduct a national campaign aimed at educating female's families to improve their learning experience, while highlighting Saudi Arabian women's' achievements in learning in such universities and their future potential to achieve even more. This could include short presentations by recognized members of the Government, academia, wider community and religious establishment in the country. This campaign should target female students' families through TV advertisements, social media and perhaps face-to-face or telephone calls by university staff. Implementing such a method could result in increasing the trust level of families towards universities, allowing the decision-makers to increase university opening hours and to ease communication channels between male tutors and female students, besides creating formal channels for female students to interact with their male students for learning purposes. Such a campaign could also benefit female students in conducting fieldwork related to their studies outside their term times, which in turn would positively affect their deep learning approach. Consequently, this would save the universities financially, in both time, effort and manpower, to facilitate placements or volunteering work, since most Saudi Arabian families would then believe in fieldwork as a method to learn and implement theories in the real world. In addition, that could also benefit Saudi Arabian society. Appendix 21 contains further detailed recommendations based on issues that were found in the study.

6.6 Future research

Extrapolating the results of this PhD study on a larger scale across all Saudi Arabian universities using quantitative survey methods could allow for generalizations to be drawn from the findings. These results should be compared with those from tutors and managerial staff to promote students' perceptions of learning in higher education and to explore tutor and staff expectations regarding the student learning experience. These results should, in turn, be distributed to the universities in order to bridge the gap between students and tutors/staff, and this would add further insights into understanding the learning experience.

Future research about learning experience could also target decision-makers at the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia in order to create a better understanding about the learning experience at all hierarchy levels within the educational system and to help identify the weaknesses and strengths in the Saudi Arabian education system in order to facilitate any proposed governmental reform processes.

Exploring Saudi Arabian female capital and its impact on Saudi Arabian women's lives could also be the focus of other future research. The possible outcomes of such research could help to understand the gap in communication between students and tutors outside lectures and it may explain curricula differences between genders in higher education in Saudi Arabia, as a step towards ensuring equal educational resources for Saudi Arabian female students in comparison with their male counterparts. However, immediate questions came out as a result of my PhD findings, suggesting my next step towards research:

- What does this abundant energy that Saudi female students demonstrated in their learning lead to?
- How is this different if different from other universities and rural areas?
- How can the learning experience in Saudi Higher Education be improved using this proposed theoretical framework?

6.7 Reflection on the study

This study represents a personal journey for myself that took me back to a place which was involved in my own development, both personally and professionally. There were multiple influences that motivated me to undertake this research, including my experiences as a female Saudi Arabian student, and as a teaching assistant in PNU, events that I had the privilege to witness and experience in 'real life'.

As I conducted this research, I recognized how much my personal knowledge - the lens through which I interpreted the data - was directly shaped by the research experience (and data) itself. This lens was made up of knowledge and assumptions from multiple resources including relevant literature, students' physical expressions, personal observation and my own experiences.

I have faced many challenges throughout the PhD journey. Before beginning this study, my knowledge in the field of learning experience was limited. I did not have any experience in researching student learning quality and learning experience. However, upon reading the literature related to learning approaches, learning environments, learning experience, sociology and qualitative approaches, I became aware of the field and felt comfortable in carrying out the research.

Additionally, reading the Saudi Arabian studies of learning experience and the background of female Saudi Arabian learning contributed to my thinking - particularly about the role of cultural influences and how religious beliefs merged with daily life activities. It has challenged my assumptions and led me to consider ways in which the study could be conducted using other research methodologies and methods. Undeniably, because of the limited published of recent and in-depth literature about female students learning in Saudi Arabia, the main focus in this area remains very much focused on the tutors' perspectives. I was in a fortunate position to develop a unique and in-depth perspective on the female Saudi Arabian student's research field. It was very challenging to guide my understanding away from my personal experience as a previous undergraduate student. Therefore, in order to avoid such a conflict, I wrote down my own experience in a notebook and then locked it away from my working documents, so I could subconsciously feel that I have expressed my feeling, but in reality, I am using the students' commentary to construct meaning from the results.

Another challenge was in choosing the methodology approach, as prior to the study, I was not familiar with qualitative research terminology and philosophy such as ontology and epistemology. Although choosing the constructivist case study was my first step towards conducting this research, and towards understanding this field in depth, choosing the data analysis approach did, however, take me some time. After several meetings and discussions with my supervisors, I chose the methods of thematic analysis as a first approach, to organize the thick data, and then went back to soft system methodology as my next approach to finalize the analysis. I have learned a great deal about data analysis by carrying out this research. As a PhD student, I have

been exposed to various theoretical perspectives and conceptual models and became more aware of how our perspectives and expectations shape our views of our social realities and ourselves. Moreover, this research has improved my awareness, my skills in research methodology and my confidence generally. It has shed light on my potential role as a contributor to literature in the field of learning experience.

When I initiated participant recruitment, it was encouraging that the study was well received and of interest generally, especially to the female students. I had anticipated encountering challenges in gaining access to staff at King Abdulaziz University (in Jeddah) and was not sure how they would perceive the study: perhaps similar to what I encountered when interviewing male tutors in Princess Norah University (in Riyadh). I was concerned they might not see their participation worthy of the time commitment. However, this was not the case, as they showed me enthusiasm and they believed in this study, which further encouraged me to disseminate the findings of this research.

This study served as my introduction to conducting qualitative research. Upon beginning the constructivist research process, I felt confident that I understood the various methods and components of case studies. However, I could not envisage how the process would actually unfold. Specifically, I wondered how I would really move from codes, sub-themes to main themes, and then develop the connection between the main themes, to propose a theoretical framework. I also wondered if I would have enough data to generate insights.

Once Soft System Methodology analysis was underway, I began to understand that the coding process occurs very naturally, because it is so closely linked to the data and is literally tied to it. As I realised that codes were repeated within and across data sources, the more abstract coding also seemed to happen easily.

Having experienced the data-collection and data-analysis process, and having listened to the female students and heard their experiences, I realised the impact of the culture and religion on the nature of students' lives. The main impact that will stay with me is the enjoyment of talking to the students: meeting participants and talking to them

gave me encouragement to complete the study because they felt so strongly that their perceptions should be heard, eliminating the barriers from society that constantly reinforced their opinions.

Finally, conducting this research has given me the opportunity to gain experience in the field of academic studies, to learn from the students themselves and to build good relations with them. Some students emailed me to ask me how my data collection was going and to enquire about the progress of my study. Throughout the PhD journey, my confidence has increased, and my glossophobia (anxiety about public speaking) has disappeared, which has had a positive impact on my research skills.

6.8 Research output

6.8.1 Publication

Quality of Women's Learning Experiences in the Digital age in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia

By: Alshaghdali, Nourah; Greener, Sue; Loveless, Avril

Edited by: Orngreen, R; Levinsen, KT

Conference: 13th European Conference on e-Learning (ECEL)

Location: Aalborg Univ, Copenhagen, DENMARK

Date: OCT 30-31, 2014

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 13TH EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON E-LEARNING (ECEL 2014)

Book Series: Proceedings on the European Conference of e-Learning

Pages: 607-617

Published: 2014

6.8.2 Presentation

-Brighton Business School (BBS) Staff and Research Students Conference 2013 / 20th September / Mithras House / CIMER (Research Student) Group / Stream 3 / Title: Quality of Women's learning experiences in the digital age in higher education in Saudi Arabia

-Brighton Doctoral College Falmer, Eastbourne & Brighton Business School Annual Conference for MPhil/PhD, Professional Doctorate and MRes Clinical Research Students 2nd - 4th July 2014 Westlain House, Falmer Campus.

-The 13th European Conference on e-Learning (ECEL) (30th-31st October 2014) and won the best PhD paper at the Doctoral symposium in Copenhagen (Appendix 24).

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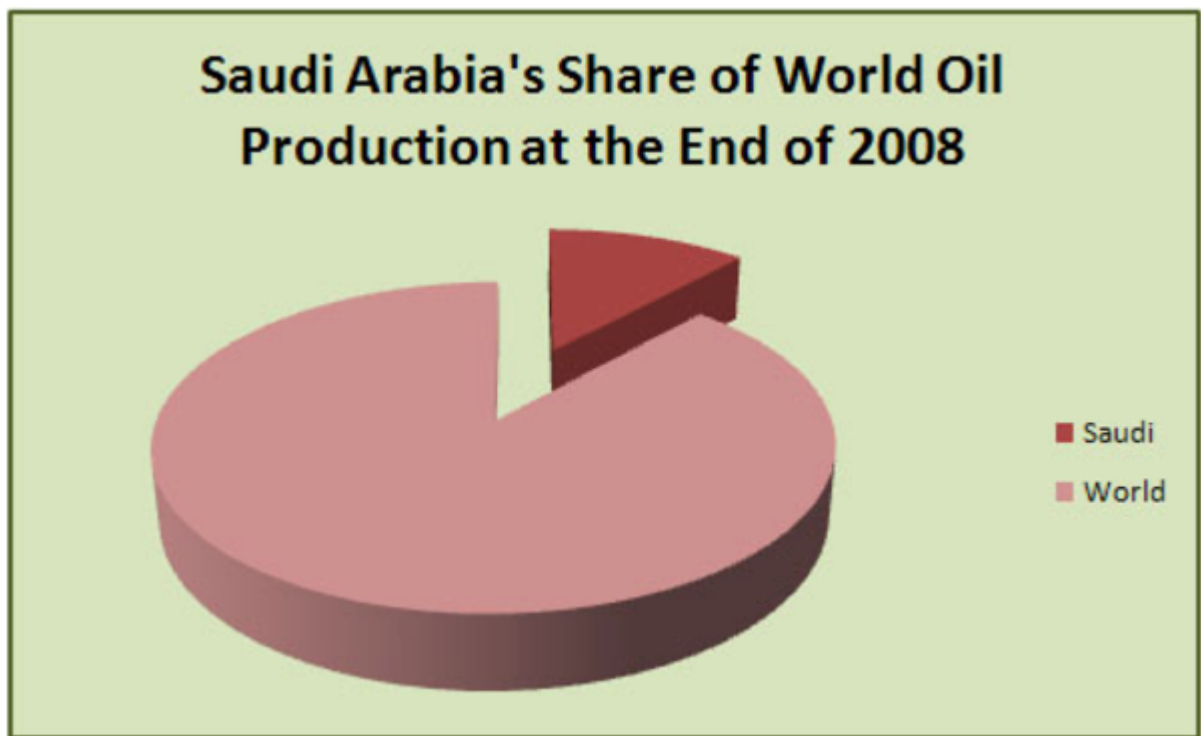
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Appendices

Appendix 1

Saudi's oil production share



(Saudi National Accounts, 2012)

Appendix 2

Ethical approval from Saudi to conduct fieldwork

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Ministry of Higher Education
Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University
(048)
الموضوع: إجازة رحلة علمية للمحاضر/ نوره الشغذلي



جامعة الأميرة نورة بنت عبد الرحمن
Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University

المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم العالي
جامعة الأميرة نورة بنت عبد الرحمن
(٠٤٨)
وكالة الجامعة للدراسات العليا والبحث العلمي
إدارة الابتعاث والإشراف المشترك

قرار رحلة علمية رقم (٢٨٧٣١) بتاريخ ١٤٣٥/٥/٠٥هـ

الاسم	الوظيفة	الجهة
نوره بنت عثمان بن محمد الشغذلي	محاضر	كلية الإدارة والأعمال جامعة الأميرة نورة بنت عبد الرحمن
رقم السجل المدني	١٠٢٣٧٧٨٦١٤	

إن مديرة جامعة الأميرة نورة بنت عبد الرحمن.

- وبناءً على الصلاحيات المخولة لنا نظاماً .
- وبناءً على موافقة معالي أ.د. وزير التعليم العالي تفويض مديري الجامعات صلاحيات امتحان أعضاء هيئة التدريس ومن في حكمهم بالخطاب رقم ١/٧٦ في ١٣/١٣/١٤٢٩هـ، وبناءً على ما ورد في لائحة الابتعاث والتدريب الواردة في نظام مجلس التعليم العالي والجامعات ولوائحه.
- وبناءً على موافقة معالي الدكتورة مديرة الجامعة على محضر الجلسة العاشرة للجنة الدائمة للابتعاث والتدريب المنعقدة بتاريخ ٢٦/٢/٢٠١٤م. ١٤٣٥/٤/٢٦هـ الموافق ٢٦/٢/٢٠١٤م.

تقرر ما يلي:

- ١- الموافقة على قيام المحاضر/ نوره بنت عثمان بن محمد الشغذلي بإجراء رحلة علمية إلى جامعة الأميرة نورة بنت عبد الرحمن لتتمكن من إكمال مشروع بحث الدكتوراه بدءاً من تاريخ ٢٧/١/٢٠١٤م الموافق ٢٦/٣/١٤٣٥هـ.
- ٢- تكون مدة الرحلة العلمية (٩٠) يوماً تحت إشراف القسم التابعة له .
- ٣- على المحاضر أن تباشر بقسمها الأكاديمي بالكلية، وأن تقدم تقريراً مفصلاً عن الرحلة التي قامت بها إلى إدارة الابتعاث.
- ٤- تعامل المذكورة وفق ما جاء في لائحة الابتعاث والتدريب لمنسوبي الجامعات المنوه عنه أعلاه .
- ٥- على مديرة إدارة الابتعاث بالجامعة متابعة سير المتبعة في دراستها وطلب تقارير فصلية لها .
- ٦- يبلغ قرارنا هذا لجميع الجهات المعنية للعمل بمقتضاه وإجراء اللازم كل فيما يخصه .

والله الموفق .

مديرة الجامعة العالي
هدى بنت محمد العميل
بقيادة الأميرة نورة بنت عبد الرحمن



الأصل لإدارة الابتعاث والتدريب


- صورة لكل من : مكتبنا
- سعادة ومهنية الجامعة للدراسات العليا والبحث العلمي
- سعادة ومهنية الجامعة
- سعادة ومهنية الجامعة للشؤون التعليمية
- سعادة عميدة شئون أعضاء هيئة التدريس والوظائف
- الراتب بطون الموظفين
- المكاتب بطون الموظفين
- المشاورات بطون الموظفين
- مدير عام إدارة العلاقات والإعلام
- الإدارة العامة للتخطيط
- الإدارة العامة للشؤون
- أمينة مجلس الجامعة (محافظة الجنس) بذلك
- ومهنية الوزارة للبحوث في التعليم العالي
- الإدارة العامة للبريد في وزارة التعليم العالي
- وزارة الخدمة المدنية الابتعاث
- سعادة مهنية الإدارة والأعمال

التاريخ: ١٤٣٥/٥/٠٥هـ الرقم: ٢٨٧٣١


Appendix 3

Ethical Approval from Brighton University

Brighton Business School


University of Brighton

Direct line 01273 642139
Fax
E-Mail *S.L.Greener@brighton.ac.uk*



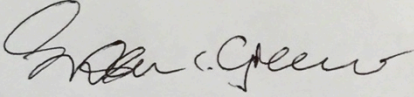
Brighton Business School
Professor Aidan Berry BA FCA
Director

Mithras House
Lewes Road
Brighton BN2 4AT
Telephone 01273 600900
Fax 01273 643597

28th November 2014

To whom it may concern

This is to confirm that, in accordance with the University of Brighton's tiered system of ethics and governance review, the research supervisors of Nourah Alshaghдали: Professor Avril Loveless and Dr Susan Greener have approved Nourah's research study proposal as achieving Tier 1 ethics approval. No further ethical scrutiny is required or recommended.



Dr S.L. Greener
Lead Supervisor for Nourah Alshaghдали
Brighton Business School
University of Brighton

Appendix 4

Invitation Letter to Participate in a Doctoral Study

Dear Student,

I hope this email finds you well.

My name is Nourah Othman Alshaghдали from the University of Brighton. I am writing you this email to invite you to participate in my doctoral research, aimed at female students of Prince Norah Bint Abdulrahman University/ and King Abdulaziz University. As a respected student of this university, your participation in this research would be very valuable. This research aims to discuss and examine the Saudi women learning experience and learning environment in Saudi public higher education sector. This research project has been approved ethically from **University of Brighton** and it will be conducted on two stages of data collection:

First: If you kindly accept this invitation, please click on the link below to take you to the questionnaire, or you can ask your tutor for a hard copy if you prefer to. The questionnaire is related to your personal experience as a female student in Saudi higher education, and it will not take more than 15 minutes to fill. In addition, your participation will contribute to address the quality of learning in higher education, and could improve your experience in university on positive way. Minor personal information will be requested on this questionnaire: age, residence, region, travel abroad, study abroad, and optional questions about your marital state, and level of your income: high- average- or low (you may choose to not answer these two questions). Your name will not be taken, and you will not be identified when doing this questionnaire (similarly through the online version of it). This is not work with a deadline and therefore you can respond to this questionnaire in a month's time. I attached more information about the research, and the questions of the questionnaire to have a look at them before deciding to answer them.

The links to the surveys are:

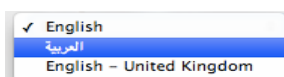
English version:

https://brightonbusiness.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_02iNTQI9P3mPD3D

Arabic version:

https://brightonbusiness.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3qlhpnXWrJVOGup

(Please note that if you wish to conduct the Arabic version of this survey just click on the language option on the top right corner of the page (**even if you can see the questions on Arabic**), so you can perfectly see the questions)



Second: there will be an interview with students on the same subject to take their own point of view anonymously. If you want to participate, in addition to this questionnaire, please contact me by sending me email to na120@uni.brighton.ac.uk or by texting me on **0599853911**, so I can send you the interview questions. The interview will take maximum 60 minutes, and we can arrange place to meet in the university whether or outside, whatever suit you.

Your contribution is vital to the success of my research and therefore I really appreciate any cooperation you feel you can give. Additionally, your participation will contribute to improving the status of Saudi female students, an aim we all seek.

If you have any questions or queries about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I am looking forward to hear from you.

Best regards,

Researcher: Nourah Othman Alshaghdali
Doctorate College at Brighton Business School
Mithras House, Lewes Road, Brighton BN2 4AT
0599853911, N.Alshaghdali@uni.brighton.ac.uk

Appendix 5

Information Sheet

What will happen to the data?

1. Data referring to respondents will be made anonymous and confidential.
2. The findings will be used only for academic purposes.
3. You can withdraw at any time during the research by informing the researcher of your decision.

What is the institution to which this study belongs?

It belongs to the University of Brighton. It is also received by, and has received ethics clearance from the University's Research Ethics Committee.

Who should I contact if I need more information or if I have concern?

If you have inquiries or want to speak to the researcher about this research study, please feel free to contact me either on my UK mobile number: 07751931905, my Saudi mobile number 0599853911, or by email: N.Alshaghdali@uni.brighton.ac.uk
If you still not happy and want to make complaint, please contact Dr. Sue Greener S.L.Greener@brighton.ac.uk who will pass on your complaint to the University's Research Ethics Committee Chair.

What type of questions I would be entitled to answer?

The questions are related to the Saudi women learning experience and learning environment in Saudi public higher education sector. However, you are going to answer the following questions in the questionnaire:

Part One: **Demographics information:**

1. Age
2. Year of Study
3. Your major field of study
4. Your place of residence
5. Travelling experiences
6. Parents qualifications
7. Your marital status (optional)
8. Family income (optional)

Part Two: **Learning experience in Saudi Higher education:**

1. What do you want to achieve from your learning in higher education?
2. Why did you choose your field of study?
3. Why did you join this particular university despite the existing of other higher educational institutes?
4. What do you think about educating Saudi women in universities?
5. How do you study outside the lecture? Please explain all methods you use for self-learning and studying?
6. What do you think about the following learning methods: VLE (Virtual learning environment: pnu.edu.sa), Face-to-face lectures, and CCTV lectures (live web lectures).

7. Would you prefer another method of teaching to be implemented in this university?
8. Do you use any social network for learning purposes, such as Internet media (i.e. Facebook, What's app ... etc.)?
9. Are there any barriers you faced to use technology in learning?
10. What do you think about the gender segregation at the CCTV lectures?
11. What do you think about the impact of the female supervision in the CCTV lectures, on your learning journey? Why?
12. How would you evaluate- generally- your personal learning journey so far in Saudi's higher education?
13. Did you encounter any obstacles during your learning journey at the university?
14. What do you suggest to improve the quality of your personal learning in Saudi universities?

Appendix 6
Participant Consent Form

Saudi female learning experience in Saudi higher education:

I agree to take part in this research, which is to examine the Saudi female student experience in public higher education in Saudi Arabia.

The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose of the study and the possible risks involved.

I have had the principles and the procedure explained to me and I have also read the information sheet. I understand the principles and procedures fully.

I am aware that I will be required to answer questions.

I understand that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the investigation at any time.

I understand how to raise a concern and make a complaint.

I agree to participate to this study.

Please tick the following box if you agreed to record your voice through the interview

I agree to record my voice during the interview and that will be only use for academic purposes.

Name (optional)

Signed (or you can write: “ I have read this sheet and Participant information sheet”)
.....

Date

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate, I really appreciate it.
Nourah Othman Alshaghdali

Appendix 7

Example of Observational Agenda (Face-to-Face Classes)

Date: 1st April 2014

Time: 11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

Course subject: Principal of administration (BUS101)

1. Class Type (lecture, exams, or revision ...etc.)

It was normal lecture- The lecturer does not use any material or slides for her subject, instead she only write (with her hand writing using blue pen) on the traditional whiteboard subheading of what she is talking about during her explanation.

2. Interaction (dialogue), and students' role

The tutor prefers repetition dialog after her, as when she give a definition of a term she ask students as whole to repeat after her. When a student ask about a point that she did not understand, the tutor told her to listen carefully to her till the end of the lecture as she might find the answer to her question. ((The tutor encourages students to only listen during the lecture and keep their questions to the end of the lecture)).

3. Student engagement (describe what I think they are doing.)

Writing: students were only writing the definitions of new theories as the tutor advised them to do so claiming that their textbook is not clearly defines them. The student's role is passive (only recipients) with two students in the back of the class were discussing (one of them was explaining a point to the other). Most of the students were silent and listening carefully ((they seemed interested on the subject)) and were writing.

4. Lecturer feedback

The tutor was trying to simplify the giving material by using simple language and ask the students to write after her. She alerted students that if they reverse the definitions on the exam she will count that wrong and will not give them any credit. At the end of the lecture she talked about what they are going to look at on the next lecture.

5. Other points of observation

Total number of students: 38

- After each subheading, the tutor ask the students two to three questions to make sure that they understood the subject and alerted them that these questions might be on the exam, so student were noting down these questions.
- At the end of the lecture the tutor repeated what she has explained briefly.
- There was no use of any technologies during the lecture (no use of computer, no use of the smart board, and no use of PowerPoint slides or any presentation's technology.
- Students only asked about changing the time of the next exam so she took some suggested dates and promised to reply to them.

Appendix 8

Business' Students interview questions

Personal information:

1. Age?
2. Year of Study
3. Major field of study?
4. Place of residence:
5. Travel abroad: if yes, where to?
6. Study abroad: if yes, where and what did you study?
7. What is your Father qualification?
8. What is your mother qualification?
9. Marital status?
10. Family Income?

Learning experience in Saudi Higher education:

1. (Main question) Tell me the story about your joining this university? Why?

(Checklist of subjects to be covered):

- a) **Goals:** Why did you enroll in Higher education institution (this university)??
- b) **Future:** What do you want to achieve from your learning in higher education? What your family thinks about it?
- c) **Culture influence:**
 - Why did you choose your field of study? Did your family help you with your choice? Why?
 - What if you have a job opportunity in mixed gender environment? What does your family think about it?

2. (Main question) How do you learn in higher education? Please explain all methods of learning and studying?

(Checklist of subjects to be covered):

- a) **Teaching in Saudi universities:** What type of teaching methods do you prefer? Why?
- b) **Fresher:** Have you introduced to the facilities of the university, i.e. refreshment day? What about your modules: have you been given any type of documents or instructions related to your modules? Can I see them?
- c) **Gender segregation in universities:**

- Which of whom do you prefer to attend to: is it female lecture or male lecture? Why?
- What if your lecturer has given you wrong information, or you may know updated information: would you tell her during the lecture? Why?
- What about if the lecturer was man: would you do the same?
- What do you think about the gender segregation at the CCTV lectures?
- What do you think about the impact of the female supervision*, on the CCTV lectures, on your learning journey? Why?

d) Personal use of technology within HE:

- Do you use any social network for learning purposes, such Facebook or WhatsApp ...etc.? Please specify? How do you use them? And why?
- Are there any barriers you faced in using technology in learning?

3. (Main question) How would you reflect generally about your personal learning journey so far in Saudi's higher education?

(Checklist of subjects to be covered):

- a) What type of problems or barriers have you faced during your learning journey?
- b) What do you suggest to improve the quality of your learning experience in Saudi's higher education?
- c) What do you think are the drawbacks and the benefits of women learning in Saudi higher education institution?

4. (Optional task) Would you show me your view of VLE and talk to me how you use it? You can read the checklist and then decide if you allow me to see it or not? The researcher is not interested in your grades, therefore I will not look at them during my observation?

***Female Supervisor:** is a woman who proceeds on the girls' class to control the behaviors of the students and to organize them, during male lectures. As the male lecturer locates in different class far from girls' class and communicate with them via one direction CCTV. The girl's students can see, hear, and talk to the lecturer using technology, while the lecturer can only hear them without seeing them.

Appendix 9

Business' Staff interview questions

Personal information:

1. Position?
2. Age?
3. Residence, and nationality:
4. Major field of study?
5. Major field of teaching, if applicable?
6. How many years of experience do you have with Saudi higher education institution?
7. Travel abroad: if yes, where to and Why?
8. Marital status?

Learning experience in Saudi Higher education:

1. (Main question) **Tell me why do you think female students have joined this university?**

(Checklist of subjects to be covered):

- a) What do you think about the role of Saudi families on their daughters learning in higher education? Why?
- b) Have you in any way had to speak or talk to students' families about learning activities, which you have entitled your students to do?

2. (Main question) **Explain to me How do you teach in university? Please reflect on your teaching experience.**

(Checklist of subjects to be covered):

1. Teaching in Saudi universities

- Do you teach in the same way that you were taught?
- Some student prefer "...” method of teaching, what do you think? Why?
- How would you start the modules to your students?
- Some students prefer to attend “female or male lectures” for these reasons”...” What do you think? Why?
- How would you react if one of your students had raised her hand in your lecture and then corrected you, or given you more updated information than yours? Why?
- Some student would do that, others do not. What do you think about that?

- Some students would still do the same, or not if the lecturer was a man: Why do you think that is?
- Tell me about the other teaching methods here in this university?

b) Gender segregation in universities:

- What do you think about the CCTV lectures? Why?
- (If the interviewee teaches the same subject of CCTV lectures) why do you think they have given this module to male lecturers to teach it to girls, when they have you, as a female lecturer?
- How would you explain the role of the female supervision on the CCTV lectures? Do you agree with it? Why?

c) Personal use of technology within HE:

- Do you use any social network for teaching purposes, such Facebook or WhatsApp ...etc.? Please specify? How? Why?
- Are there any barriers you faced in using technology in learning?

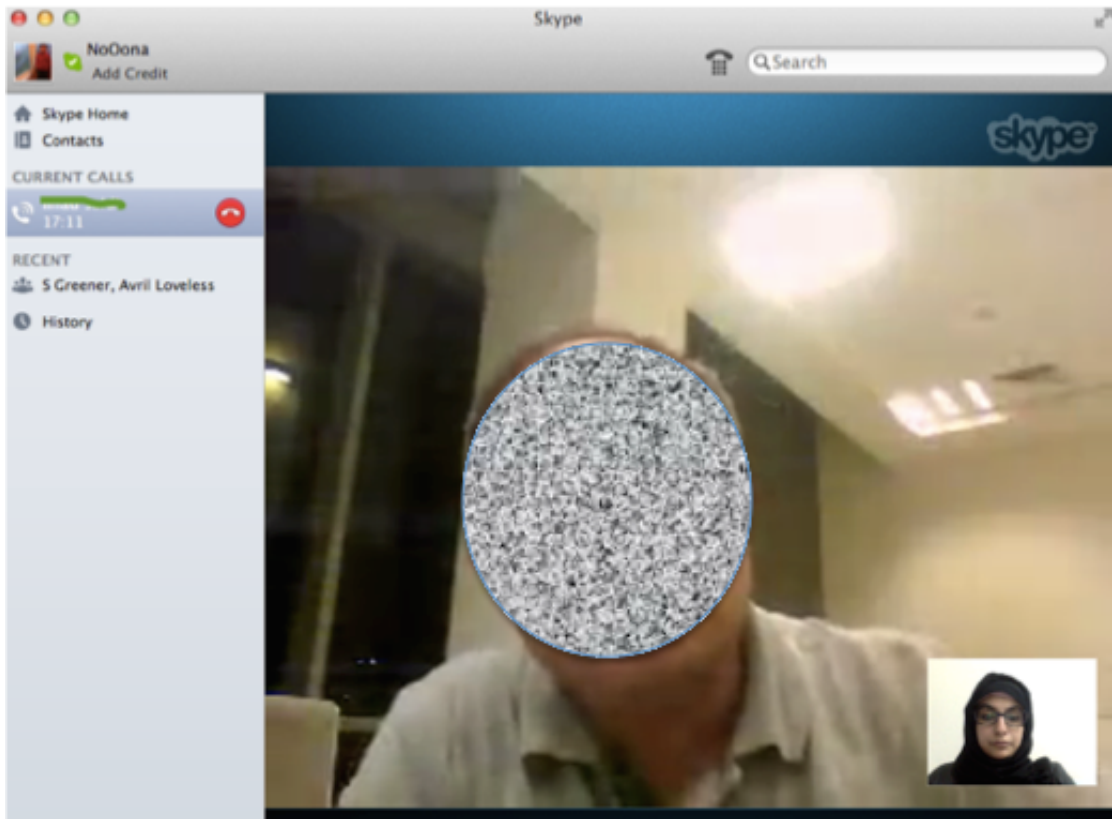
3. (Main question) How would you reflect generally about the learning experience in Saudi's higher education?

(Checklist of subjects to be covered):

- d)** Are there any complaints you have had to face or heard from students that related to their learning experience? What were they? How have they been resolved?
- e)** What do you think are the drawbacks and the benefits of women learning in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions?
- f)** What do you suggest to improve the quality of learning in Saudi's higher education?
- g)** Some of the students' suggestions were:... What do you think about it? Why?

4. (Optional task) Would you show me your view of VLE and talk to me about how you use it? You can read the checklist and then decide if you wish to allow me to see it or not? The researcher is not interested in your grades, therefore I will not look at them during my observation?

Appendix 10
Interviewing a Staff from Business school using Skype



Appendix 11


Example of the Questions of the Questionnaires

Demographics information:

Please select the most appropriate choice that applies to you, from the lists given below:

1. Age:
 18-20 21-23 24-26 27-29 30 and over
2. Year of Study:
 1st year 2nd year 3rd year 4th year 5th year and more
3. Your major field of study:
 Economics Business Accounting Law
 Marketing Finance
4. Your place of residence (please choose, and specify):
 City: village:
5. Have you travelled abroad:
 No •Yes: Arab countries
 Non-Arab countries
 Both (Arab and non-Arab Countries)
6. Have you studied abroad:
 No •Yes: Arab countries
 Non-Arab countries
 Both (Arab and non-Arab Countries)
7. Your father's education level:
 Elementary Secondary
 high school Diploma
 Baccalaureate Masters
 PhD
- Mother level of education:
 Elementary Secondary
 high school Diploma
 Baccalaureate Masters
 PhD
8. Marital status (please choose):
 Single Married Divorced widow Prefer not to state
9. Family income (please choose):
 High (more than SR.14084) Average (around SR. 14084*) Low (less than SR.14084)
 Prefer not to state

* Based on Saudi Central Department of statistics and information, 2012 (http://www.csd.gov.sa/www/index.html/2012/11/2012-11-25-10-17-08-3017)



Learning experience in Saudi Higher education:

1. What do you want to achieve from your learning in higher education?

.....
.....

2. Why did you choose your field of study?

.....
.....
.....

3. Why did you join this particular university despite the existing of other higher educational institutes?

.....
.....

4. What do you think about educating Saudi women in universities?

.....
.....
.....

5. How do you study outside the lecture? Please explain all methods you use for self learning and studying?

.....
.....
.....

6. What do you think about the following learning methods:

VLE (Virtual learning environment: pnu.edu.sa):

.....
.....

Face-to-face lectures:

.....
.....

CCTV lectures (live web lectures):

.....
.....
.....

7. Would you prefer another method of teaching to be implemented in this university? Please explain.

.....
.....

8. Do you use any social network for learning purposes, such as Internet media (i.e. Facebook, what's app ... etc.)? Please specify.

Application name

.....

Explaining the use of it in learning

.....
.....
.....

9. Are there any barriers you faced to use technology in learning? Please give further details.

.....
.....

10. What do you think about the gender segregation at the CCTV lectures?

Your opinion

.....
.....

Reasons

.....
.....

11. What do you think about the impact of the female supervision in the CCTV lectures, on your learning journey? Why?

-Their impact:

.....
.....

-Reasons:

.....
.....
.....

12. How would you evaluate- generally- your personal learning journey so far in Saudi's higher education?

Please explain your experience's evaluation:

.....
.....
.....

Evaluation scale:

Not at all satisfied										Extremely satisfied
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Did you encounter any obstacles during your learning journey at the university?

Yes*

No

* If your answer was yes, please explain them, and how did you overcome them:

.....
.....
.....

14. What do you suggest to improve the quality of your personal learning in Saudi universities?

.....
.....
.....

Thank you for participating, I really appreciate it,
Nourah O. Alshaghdali
Na120@uni.brighton.ac.uk

Appendix 12
Backgrounds of Respondents of the Questionnaires

Major field of study		Total
Management of information systems		16
HR		4
Accounting		44
Finance		25
Public Administration	General	11
	Hospital management	7
	Organisation and development of administrative	38
	Administrative science	3
	Institutions and offices administration	1
	Information management	1
Business general		24
Law		46
Marketing		32
Economics		6
Total		258

Age	Total
18 - 20	114
21 - 23	136
24 - 26	4
27 - 29	1
30 and above	2
Missing data	1
Total	258

Year of study	Total
Preparatory year	0
Year one	71
Year two	57
Year three	61
Year four	39
Year five and above	29
Missing data	1
Total	258

Marital state	Total
Single	223
Married	33
Prefer not to state	2
Total	258

Appendix 13

Backgrounds of Students Participants' (Jeddah's Case Study)

Name	Age	Major of study	Year of Study	Marital status
Sarah	21	Management of information systems (MIS)	Fifth	Single
Bashayer	21	Hospital Administration (HA)	Fourth	Married
Fatimah	23	Public Administration (PAD)/ Organisation and development of administrative	Fifth	Single
Dareen	22	Accounting	Fourth	Single
Haneen	21	Public Administration (PAD)/ Organisation and development of administrative	Third	Single
Nibras	22	Business/ Human Resource (HR)	Third	Single
Mashael	21	Public Administration (PAD)/ Organisation and development of administrative Administration	Third	Single
Yosra	22	Finance	Fifth	Married
Noor	20	Management of information systems (MIS)	Second	Single

During the interview, eight out of the nine students had their heads and clothes uncovered (without Abaya and hijab); the remaining one student was wearing (Abaya) as her body and clothes were covered with only her full head being revealed. Interviews were carried out in Arabic with Students inside the university campus.

Appendix 14

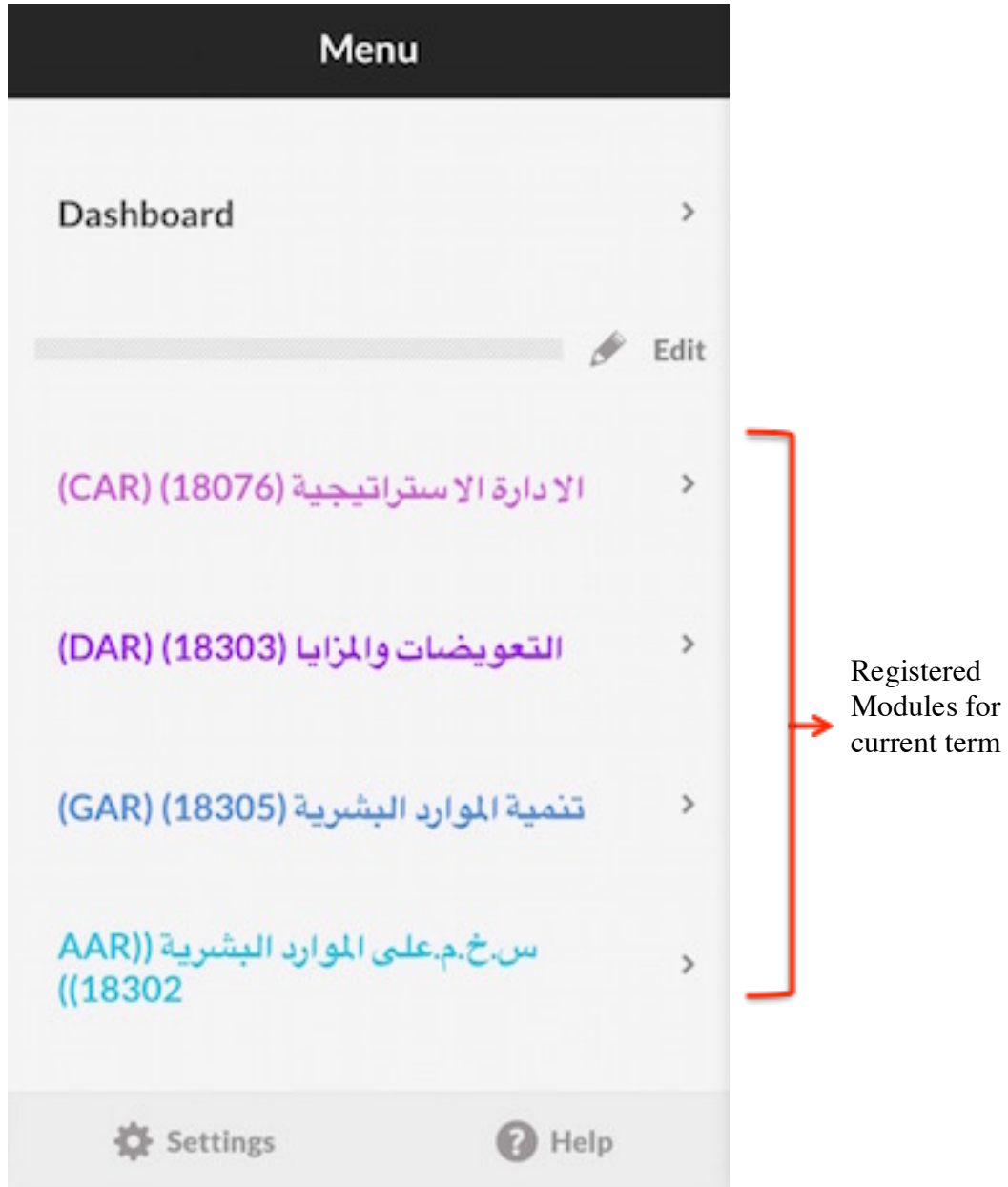
Backgrounds of Students Participants' (Riyadh's Case Study)

Name	Age	Major of study	Year of Study	Marital status
Muradi	20	Marketing (Mar)	Second	Single
Atheer	Late 20s	Accounting	Fourth	Single
Haifa	21	Economics (Econ)	Forth	Single
Ahad	20	Accounting	Second	Single
Arwa A.	20	Accounting	Forth	Single
Sita	23	International Financing (Int. Finance)	Second	Married
Arwa B.	21	Law	Forth	Single
Ohod	20	Law	Forth	Single
Najd	20	Business (Bus)	Fifth	Single

During the interview, four out of the nine students had their heads and clothes uncovered (without Abaya and hijab); the remaining five students were wearing (Abaya) as her body and clothes were covered with only her full head being revealed. Interviews were carried out in Arabic with Students inside the university campus.

Appendix 15

Main page of My KAU



Appendix 16
Gates inside Girls' campus



Gates and walls to segregate female campus from outside world



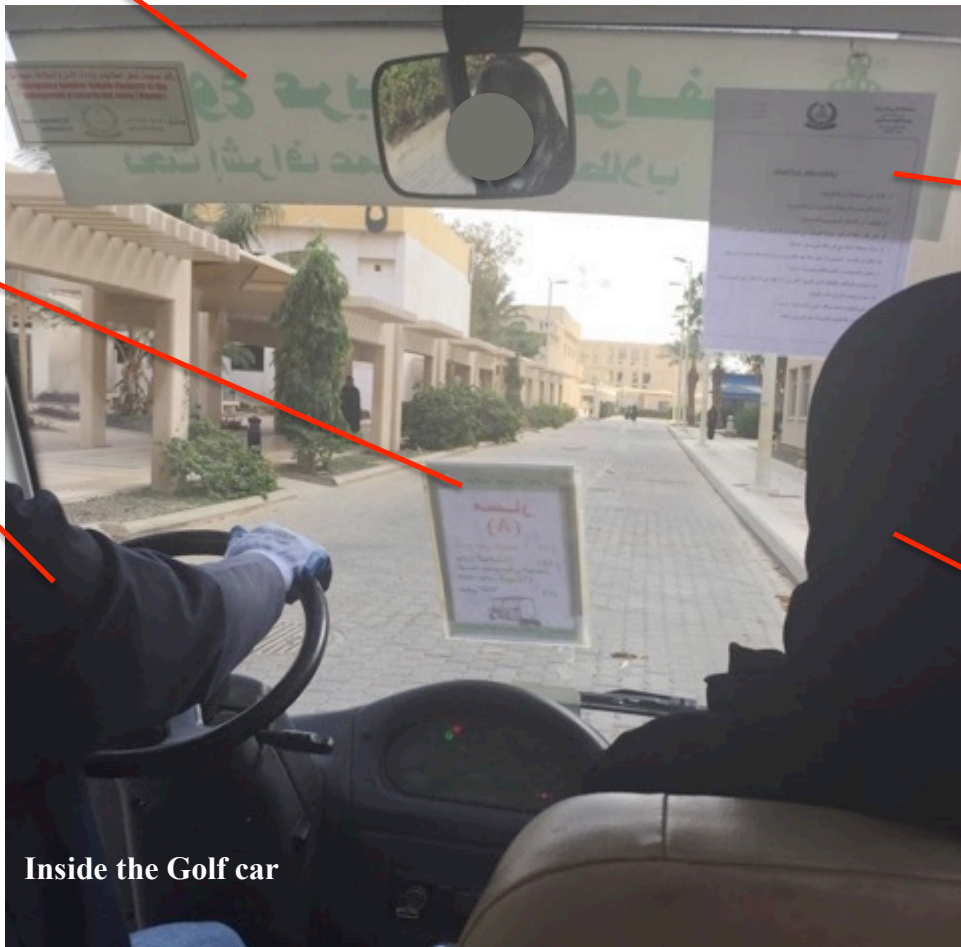
Appendix 17

Transportation between buildings inside Girls' campus from one case study



Golf cars operates between buildings inside women campus

Under the supervision of the students' Deanship



Red line (A)

authorisation

Female driver
(authorised
staff)

Female
passenger
(student)

Inside the Golf car

Appendix 18

Transportation between buildings inside Girls' campus from the other case study

**Metros operate
between buildings
inside women
campus**



**Metro's map
including lines
between building of
women campus**

Inside of one Metro



Appendix 19

Girls' campus from one Case Study



CCTV lectures building



Bank building



Sport club building (Sport Tent) doors closed and chained

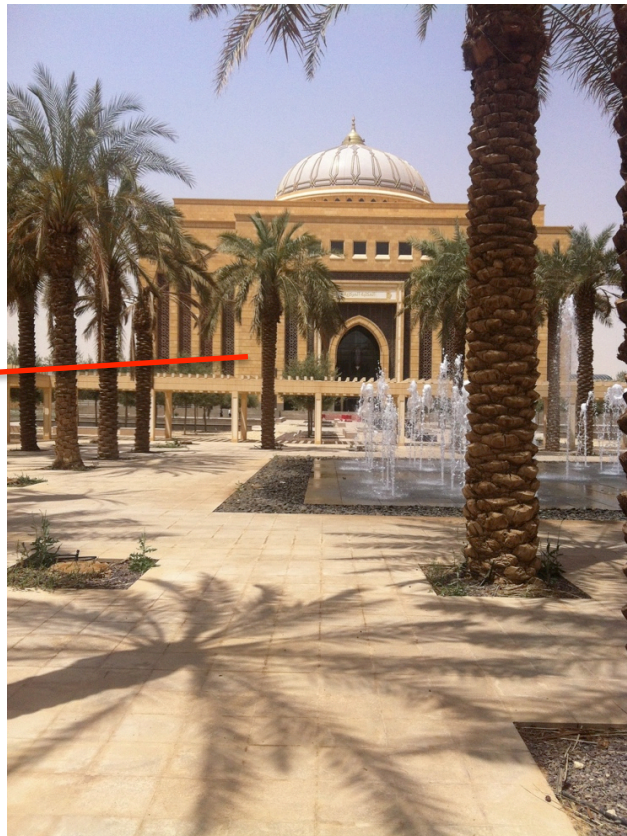
Appendix 20

Girls' campus from the other Case Study



12 pm, no food

Canteen of the Business school



Main Library

Female campus in one case study

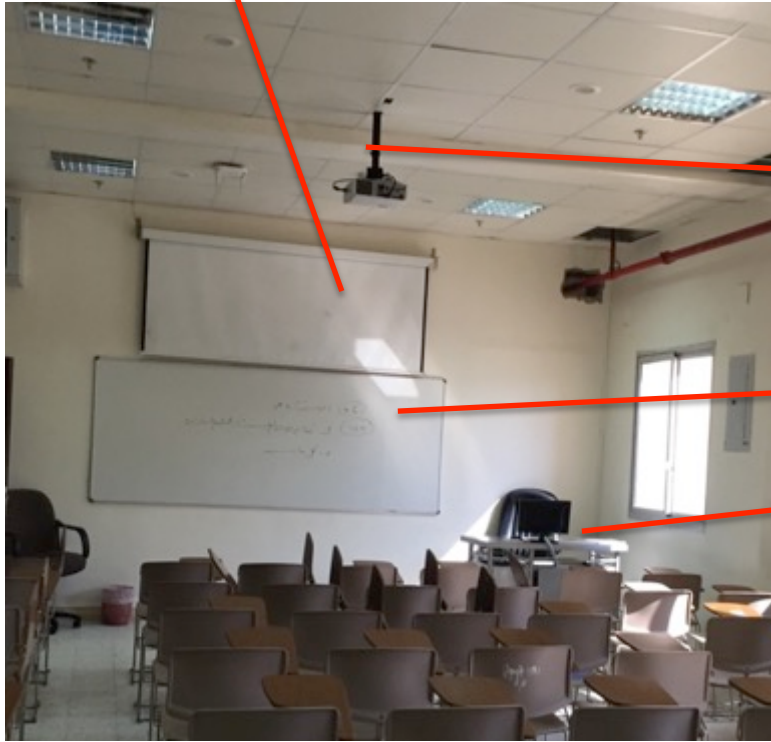
Appendix 21

Girls' Classes from one Case Study



Face-to-face lecture class (theater)

Soft screen



Projector

White board
to write on

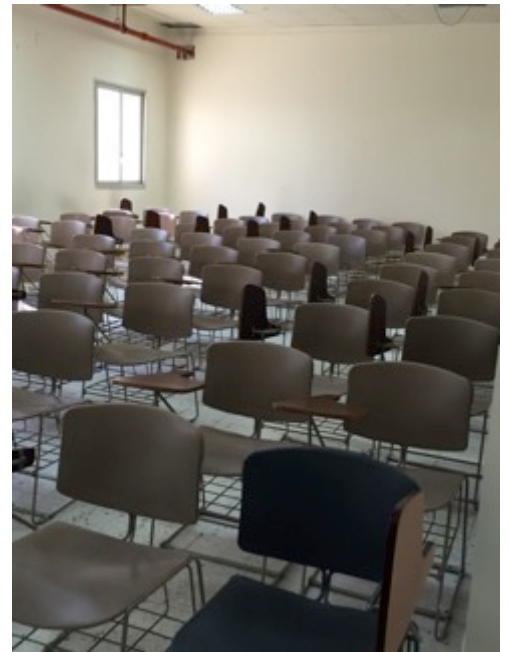
Tutor computer
table

Tutor computer
table

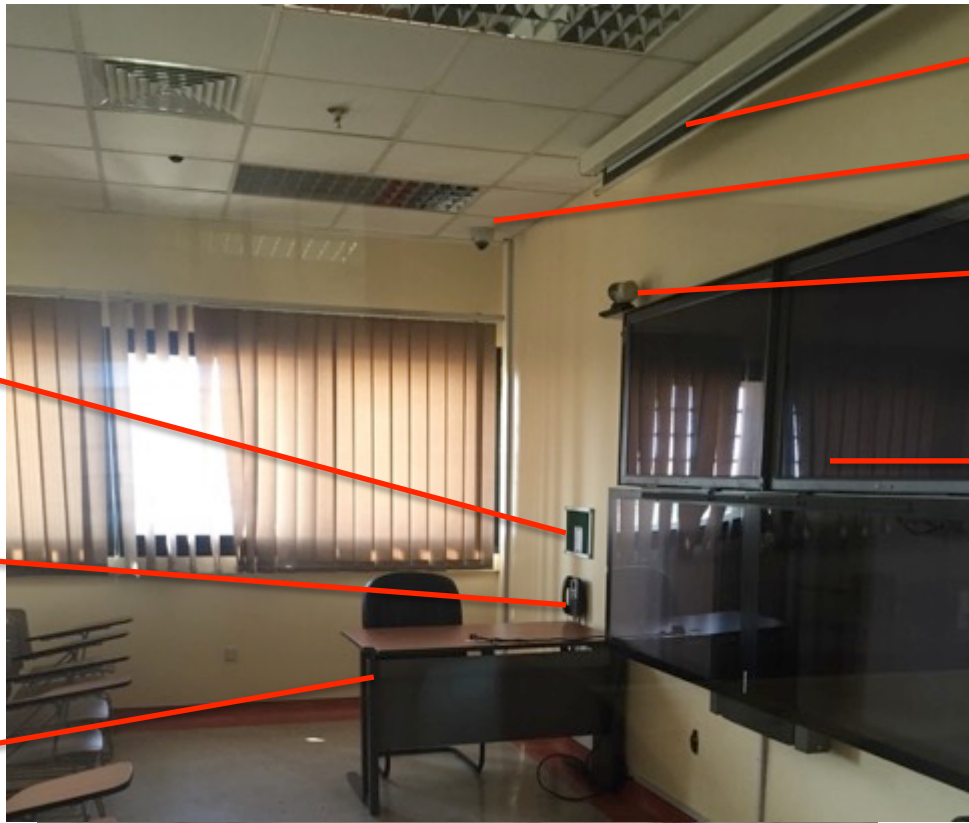
Keyboard

Mouse and screen
attached and locked

PC box



Face-to-face lecture class (normal class, one level)



List of important Telephone numbers such IT

Telephone to contact male tutor privately

Female supervisor disk

Soft screen for projector

Microphone to hear

Speaker

4 T.V screens



CCTV lecture class (normal class, one level)

Appendix 22

Girls' Classes from the other Case Study

Same Class for face-to-face lecture and CCTV lectures

Soft screen ←



→ Door (1)

Tutor computer table can control smart boards and can open CCTV to have male lecturer

White board to write on

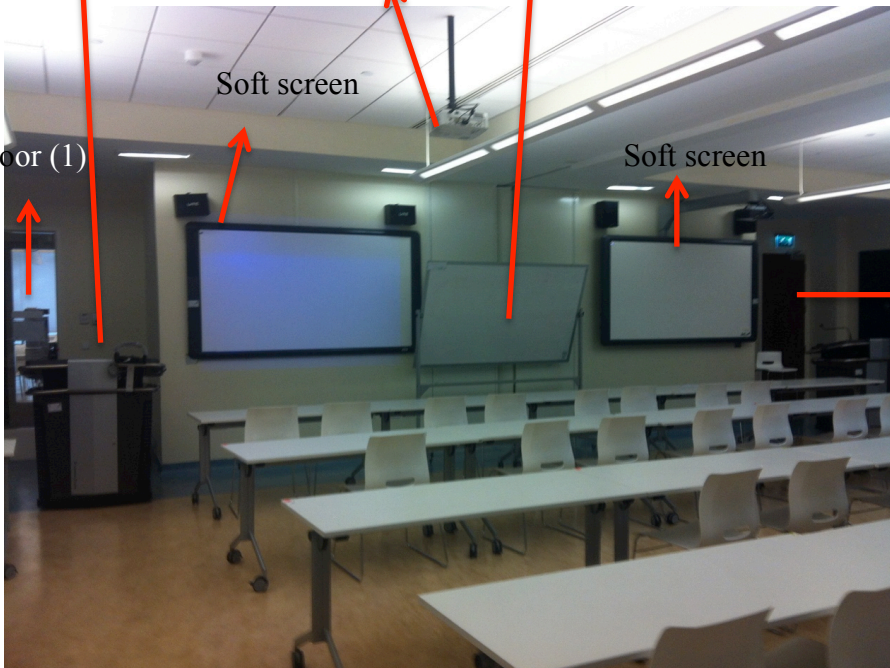
Projector

Soft screen

Soft screen

Door (1)

→ Door (2)



Appendix 23

Recommendations based on issues that were found in the study

Main issues (Findings)	Recommendations	
	Short, quick solution (Within 1-2 years)	Long term solution (Policy and regulation recommendations) (Within 5-10 years)
<p>1-Saudi Arabian culture as a barrier to the female learning experience*.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">And</p> <p>2- Religious interpretation as a barrier to the female learning experience*.</p> <p>*Those two issues are the umbrella for the following concerns: pressure to have very high grades, interactions with male students and male tutors, and the debatable gathering for group study or group projects outside of normal university opening times.</p>	<p>Using TV advertisements, social media (WhatsApp[®] and Twitter[®] as they are the most popular channels reached by Saudi Arabians (according to this PhD's findings) and perhaps face-to-face or telephone calls by university staff to reach female students' families. These steps are preliminary to the next step of the strategic recommendations for the next (5-10 year) stage.</p>	<p>After reaching families of the female students via various media channels, such as TV and social websites, making the Saudi Arabian community members aware of the importance of the issue (improving the female learning experience). Then the next step should be activated: short presentations by recognized members of the Government, academia, wider community and religious figures in the country. This secondary step is important to implement after the implementation of the earlier recommendations and after certainty about the Saudi Arabian community's shock absorption to protect these recognized fellows from any harm.</p>
<p>3- Difficulty in accessing universities' resources (library/computers)</p>	<p>Extending the library's opening time to an extra one hour after the usual finishing time of last lecture of the Business School, without needing to employ new staff</p>	<p>Improve electronic resources (databases) and their capacity to cover not only the catalogue of books that can be borrowed but to have electronic copies off all books and research articles to minimize</p>

Main issues (Findings)	Recommendations	
	Short, quick solution (Within 1-2 years)	Long term solution (Policy and regulation recommendations) (Within 5-10 years)
	<p>for this task, as current staff can work in shift system to cover this suggested one hour of operation. This recommendation is only temporary until the long-term suggestion can be implemented and operated on university's website.</p> <p>However, for the computer facilities: suggestion of allowing students to bring their own laptops or tablets, and facilitating network use so they can send their printing needs from their own devices to the university's printers.</p>	<p>cultural difficulty for female students needing to physically visit the university's library in off-hours.</p>
4- the absence of textbooks for taught subjects.	<p>Allow students to either buy the books from university bookshops or produce an online version that students could buy and keep on their I-Pad. In addition, the university's library has to stock over 100 copies of each textbook of each course and once 25 copies are sold then</p>	<p>Establish a library books borrowing system (long and short term) for students so they can reserve a copy of a book and take it out with them to study at home or just within the library. This should be linked to students' ID number and their (ODUS or Black board) accounts. In addition, establish cooperation with book publishers to have copies</p>

Main issues (Findings)	Recommendations	
	Short, quick solution (Within 1-2 years)	Long term solution (Policy and regulation recommendations) (Within 5-10 years)
	they would re-stock again. Also have two copies available for each tutor if they wanted to use it or copy it. Moreover, keeping 5 copies of each book in the Business School, so they have every chance to find these books if they wish to.	at universities for sale.
5- Feeling they are different from male students. And 6- Finding male students/peers who enroll at the same module to exchange information about the subject, exams, and tutor's comments can be very difficult for some female students.	Unify the university's electronic forum to cover both student genders for conversations (as suggested by Bashayer/HA) to gain families' trust that these conversations are supervised by the university and are only for learning purposes. In addition, through this suggested forum, female students can easily find their male peers to exchange information about their learning and benefit from their experiences.	Use of mixed-gender virtual classes to mitigate unsupervised contact with male students in a university led website.
7- Problems with	The findings of this study could further influence officials in Saudi	

Main issues (Findings)	Recommendations	
	Short, quick solution (Within 1-2 years)	Long term solution (Policy and regulation recommendations) (Within 5-10 years)
transportation to the university.	Arabia to consider allowing female university students to drive their own cars. Also need to consider the university planning Metro routes in Riyadh (currently still under construction) and establish a similar network in Jeddah.	
8- ODUS/ Black Board and students registration/ timetable	University could consider increasing timeline for this period (maximum of two weeks after the beginning of the academic semester) and offering email/telephone/dedicated office information by staff that could help students if they encounter any difficulties.	The university needs to improve technical effectiveness to ensure timely student registration/module selection.
9- Female students feel isolated in CCTV lectures as some tutors ask them to turn off their microphones.	CCTV lectures should always involve two-way communication. Tutors should not be allowed to turn off the students microphones. Instead, the female supervisor should be responsible for preventing class disturbance. Moreover, CCTV lectures should be prepared by tutors and female supervisors at least 15 minutes prior to the start of each lecture to avoid	Another suggestion would be other “newer” technical lecture delivering software: maybe move the whole class to use website based lectures that require individual student logging in by using computer for each student. This could be initiated at the university’s computer pool where each student would be using headphones and microphones. With this individual logging in the male tutor can have the registration list

Main issues (Findings)	Recommendations	
	Short, quick solution (Within 1-2 years)	Long term solution (Policy and regulation recommendations) (Within 5-10 years)
	wasting valuable resources (time, effort, cost of transportation).	by only looking at the names (usernames) of users logged in. In addition, this proposal could be extended to male students that in case of having mixed-gender class both gender has to be virtually in attendance to achieve equality in class interaction between male tutor and his students (male and female). Also, when using these lectures, they could be given later in the day, allowing students to attend them from the comfort of their home especially if female student face transportation challenges.
10- Old outdated lectures and study materials.	Improve relationships with other university's academic staff (in Saudi Arabia and/or externally) and encourage visiting lectures/joint programs with other universities.	
11- No healthy food/have to go long distance to get food.	Provide and distribute healthy snacks/sandwiches/vending machines.	The university needs to be proactive in providing a healthy food business franchise to open branches in the universities. They need to be monitored and well situated for students: no more than a five minute walk away.
12- Negative attitude/behavior from staff towards	Awareness campaign for all university staff (emails, meetings and training)	Need to have policy/procedure for staff, especially a code of conduct in dealing with students, as they

Main issues (Findings)	Recommendations	
	Short, quick solution (Within 1-2 years)	Long term solution (Policy and regulation recommendations) (Within 5-10 years)
students.	<p>pertaining to the importance of the students' learning experience and their satisfaction, as students are the central core and the very purpose for establishing such institutions.</p> <p>Nevertheless, students need to be aware of the role of the administration staff, and they need to be informed about their designated staff contacts who would be ready to answer and to guide any query coming from the students. This can be done by emails, awareness workshops and through students' handbook.</p>	<p>should be aware. In addition, staff should receive training/lecture about communication with the public (students).</p>
13- Interaction with male tutors is hard for some female students.	<p>Encouraged female students to use available methods to communicate with male tutors. They need to be reminded that they will most likely work with them in their future and also be reminded that policy/procedures will protect them and they need to</p>	<p>Community's awareness campaign by religious figures that even prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) has dealt with women, and give example that Aisha (his wife) used to teach both (male and female) without limitation, and that his first wife Khadija used to be an entrepreneur who dealt with</p>

Main issues (Findings)	Recommendations	
	Short, quick solution (Within 1-2 years)	Long term solution (Policy and regulation recommendations) (Within 5-10 years)
	report any misconduct so they could feel more confident in these interactions. However, male tutors should encourage female students to participate during lectures and might award them extra grades (bonus) for their participation regardless of the accuracy of students' answers.	different men to accomplish business deals and none of them had to be restricted because of being women or Muslim. Use religious examples.
14- The need to find previous students for expert help.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -This can be arranged by tutors to pass universities emails between students or arranging introductory lectures by the start of each semester, hosting graduated/advanced students. - Tutors might need to be trained and instructed to bridge the gap between students' knowledge and tutors' expertise by emailing tutors, distributing advice sheets and having meetings about the students' need to be academically advised and, in some cases, guided through their studies. Maybe could 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University has to arrange student meetings and a "welcome day" for new students. Advanced students should host these events to pass their experience on to the newer students. - Send/advise current students to attend local conferences to meet and network with other students.

Main issues (Findings)	Recommendations	
	Short, quick solution (Within 1-2 years)	Long term solution (Policy and regulation recommendations) (Within 5-10 years)
	also show some examples of the type of exams set from previous years during the lectures.	
15- the use of social media as a reliable resource.	- Invite tutors to use such platforms and utilize them for education purposes to ease the contact with students. As currently, according to Jaafar and his colleagues' study (Jaafar et al., 2017), young females tend to use social websites excessively. For example, Instagram can be implemented in learning when tutors use the live stream for explanation and further discussion. Also, Twitter can be used to send news regarding delays or the cancelation of a lecture.	Build a platform that can combine all of the popular social websites and implement it for education purposes.
16- Students' justified plagiarism and cheating.	Educate both students and tutors about the danger and non-acceptance of plagiarism and how developed countries treat such an incident. Use religious references to remind students that Islam does not	Implement strong regulations that encourage the production of novel assignment with rewards, such as higher student grades or lunch vouchers, for example. Similarly when a cheating incidence has been detected, a University Council

Main issues (Findings)	Recommendations	
	Short, quick solution (Within 1-2 years)	Long term solution (Policy and regulation recommendations) (Within 5-10 years)
	approve of such behaviour, even when they have good justification for it.	should be convened to discuss the penalty for such a violation of ethics. Saudi Arabia should import and adopt regulations which have been implemented and proven worthwhile in developed countries and use these procedures as models locally.
17- solidarity of students to face exams and tutors.	Establish education campaigns to encourage a change in such behaviour outside of examination halls. Make it clear that solidarity should be focused against plagiarism and cheating, and not be used to promote such rejected behaviour.	Form a student body which can facilitate a time and place for students to help each other with their studies or explain a difficult subject to each other.
18- overall grades are highly dependent on final exams (80% on final exams, while only 20% on course work assignments, homework and projects).	In skill-based modules participation grades are required which can be distributed throughout the year of full work. Assignments and rewards could be bonuses. For example, if a student did not attend a class but they informed the tutor in advance	Establish coordination between Saudi Arabian universities and a university from the developed world in order to adapt Saudi Arabian marking criteria and assessments. Implement a sort of mentoring system for a given period at least, in order to facilitate a higher world ranking.

Main issues (Findings)	Recommendations	
	Short, quick solution (Within 1-2 years)	Long term solution (Policy and regulation recommendations) (Within 5-10 years)
	that they could not attend, the tutor could give them a bonus mark for communication and being responsible enough to inform them in advance (for communication subjects at least). Bonuses are good but they would only be encouraged in a module which requires active participation.	
19- Memorizing materials as a learning strategy.	<p>Give students specific reading lists and encourage them to do extra self-directed work. It is the student's responsibility as to whether they wish to do the minimum required or as much as possible, provided the university can give them access to the required facilities/books.</p> <p>-Introducing student support classes which run during the academic term to help students' in the transition to university higher level study/and thereby gain better academic skills.</p>	<p>-Ban subject summaries of anything and remove them from the universities.</p> <p>-Establish a Collaboration Programme between the higher education sector and the public education sector, to report issues and develop skills which are required for university level study so that any shortcomings can be tackled during the early years of education, thereby ensuring that prospective students have the prepared skill sets.</p>

Main issues (Findings)	Recommendations	
	Short, quick solution (Within 1-2 years)	Long term solution (Policy and regulation recommendations) (Within 5-10 years)
	-Reviewing of the foundation year programs, by the university's administration, to ensure the enforced discarding of bad practices and replacing them with research skills.	
20- the obsession with scoring full marks.	Show students exactly how tutors mark papers. As long as grading scheme is transparent, available for students to understand, and fair, then it would not be such a problem.	Launch campaigns through television to educate public about grading system. Show successful examples of people who used to score low grades but are perfect at practical work.
21- Academic supervision.	Set up monthly meetings with all lecturers and 2 student representatives from each class group.	Have database for each academic supervisor and link it with all of his students to send them regular emails about academic concerns and any new regulations which the university must comply with.
22- how to deal with difficulties in Mathematics, Finance and Accounting, in particular.	Add extra tutorials and try to back up and support the students.	Bridge the gap between the outcome from High School and the skill set required for university study.

Appendix 24

**Certificate of the best PhD paper awarded at the Doctoral symposium in
Copenhagen**

