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FEMALE SAUDI DEPENDENT STUDENTS AND LANGUAGE LEARNING INVESTMENT AND RESISTANCE: A CASE STUDY OF FOUR FEMALE MUSLIM SAUDI STUDENTS IN THE US

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INVESTMENT AND RESISTANCE: A CASE STUDY OF FOUR FEMALE MUSLIM

SAUDI STUDENTS IN THE US

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father (Abdulaziz Alshabibi), who greatly contributed to my intellectual and professional success. To my beloved mother (Norah Alhamidi), who always encouraged and supported me and my siblings to gain more knowledge and become successful. To my loving and amazing husband (Yazeed Alqabbaa), who lessened all the burdens I have faced during this long journey and supported me physically and emotionally to complete this project. To my brothers, sisters, nephews, and nieces, who were with me throughout this journey with their prayers and emotional support. And finally, to my beloved children (Zainah, and Taim) for being my greatest inspiration.

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Abstract

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Driven by Norton's (2012) concept of investment and the role of agency and identity in second language acquisition, this study investigated the relationship between religion, cultural identity, and language learning investment among four female Saudi dependent students in an intensive English institute (IEI) in the US. The study examined how students invested their agency as mothers and wives to learn English and how such factors as their Islamic garb, co-educational classes, family, friends, teachers, and class activities increased or decreased their learning opportunities.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with each participant. Two had dropped out of the IEI, and two were still enrolled at the time of data collection. Data were also collected by observing the enrolled participants once a week in a language class for two months. Short follow-up interviews were conducted after each observation to learn more about their weekly performance and any challenges they encountered.

The findings revealed that aspects of participants' religious and cultural identity influenced their investment in learning English. Experiencing a co-educational class for the first time increased the feeling of anxiety toward participating in class for some students, and negative attitudes toward their Islamic garb could also influence their language learning investment in class. As a result, they showed two types of resistance: 1) disengagement from classroom activities as indicated by not attending class, not engaging in activities, skipping exams, and failing courses and 2) resistance against Islamophobia and discrimination, which worked as a facilitator for one student to learn

English. Furthermore, these dependent students were expected to meet responsibilities at home, which could constrain their language learning investment. Some resisted their positioning as students and failed to learn English in class because they could not compromise between their roles as wives/mothers and students. In contrast, participants who negotiated their cultural identity found ways to invest in learning English that did not contradict their values, such as practicing with Americans outside class, not sitting next to male classmates, using websites to practice rather than attending social events, reading books, and watching television and movies in English.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This study investigates the relationship between the identity, agency investment, and language learning of four female dependent Saudi students who held F2 visas and accompanied their husbands, who were enrolled in degree programs, to the US. The study used the dual lens of identity and agency to understand students' engagement and investment in an intensive English institute (IEI) at an American university. In addition, the study looked at how the students invested their agency as mothers and wives to learn English in the US and how religious, cultural, and institutional factors, such as their Islamic garb, co-educational classes, family members, friends, teachers, and class activities, increased or decreased their learning opportunities. The study addressed these problems by conducting semi-structured interviews with each of the four participants. Two of the participants had dropped out of the IEI, while the other two were enrolled in the IEI at the time of data collection. In addition, data were collected by observing the two enrolled participants once a week in a language class for two months. The researcher also conducted short follow-up interviews after each class observation in order to know more about their weekly performance and any social and educational challenges they encountered during their learning process.

The study focused on internal and private factors making the learning process difficult for these participants by examining their in-class agency and considering other factors, such as social, cultural, and religious norms and beliefs. The study offers an in-depth discussion about how social and religious factors in a Western country affected their identities. Therefore, studying language learning, identity, and agency with

dependent Saudi women could provide a way to more closely examine the role of gender in adult language learning processes, particularly in intensive English programs, where mismatches between teacher and student expectations may not be visible due to dependent students' tendency to drop out and not return to programs, and learners with external pressures may exhibit resistance to the constraints placed on them both by English programs and other pressures (e.g., their families or the external community).

Identity and agency are important in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) as well as in this study because they were used to examine the learning experience of the four women. SLA studies argue for the need to acknowledge that second language (L2) learning is ultimately a socially mediated process (Deters, Gao, Miller, & Vitanova, 2015). This means it is important to examine the social factors that can influence the L2 learning process by focusing on learner identity and agency. Duff (2012) defined identity as "one's connection or identification with a particular group, and the meanings that connection has for an individual" (p. 415). This definition suggests that identity is shaped and controlled by the circumstances around the learner. Therefore, learners can have multiple identities depending on the context, group of people around them, and the purpose of the social relations. Another important aspect of these processes for dependent Saudi students is the ability to achieve agency in and out of the classroom. Agency refers to "people's ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal or social transformation" (Duff, 2012, p. 417).

When people come to the US planning to learn English, some learn successfully, and others fail to finish their courses or completely refuse learning. The reasons for these

differences are complex and related to the fact that some social, academic, and cultural factors can hinder leaners or provide opportunities to learn. As a result, Norton (2012) proposed the construct of investment in place of motivation. Investment is "a construct that signals the complex relationship between language learner identity and language learning commitment" (p. 3). According to Norton, learners could be motivated to learn the L2, but when they come to class, it can be hard for them to engage in classroom practices due to religious, social, or educational problems. Therefore, it is important to consider not only learners' academic problems or needs but also their ability to learn and how they learn.

Identity and agency are related in adult learning. Since agency allows learners to make decisions and change both themselves and the classroom processes around them (McKinney & van Pletzen, 2004; Morita, 2004; Norton, 2013; Talmy, 2008), it has a great influence on their self-investment in learning a new language, socializing with native speakers, and adjusting to a different culture. In addition, agency and anxiety influence each other and consist of a range of dimensions that help learners develop effective strategies to cope with anxiety (Deters et al., 2015).

The four women in this study were strongly tied to their Islamic identity even after moving to the US. Therefore, it was important to focus on the role of their agency during the L2 learning process for many reasons. First, it was important to look at the participants' ability to negotiate their Islamic identity in an American social and academic context because some students potentially resist studying for social, ideological, cultural, or religious reasons. Second, participants were motivated to learn English, but because of certain aspects of their religious and cultural identities (such as

their Islamic garb and interacting with male individuals), they could be less able to invest in learning or socializing in English-speaking environments.

The four participants faced many challenges during their learning experience in the IEI. First, Saudi students generally expected that IEI teachers and classmates would respect and understand their religious beliefs. These beliefs included two important concepts: appearance (Islamic garb) and socializing with male classmates. Therefore, if the participants felt that a class activity contradicted these beliefs, such as others displaying a negative attitude about their appearance or forcing them to deal with male students, they became discouraged about participating in groupwork or talking in front of the class. Such a situation could also limit the chances for some of them to practice English outside the classroom, resulting in participants showing resistance to attending social events arranged by the IEI.

Second, as "dependent" students, it was expected that they would uphold family responsibilities as mothers and wives; therefore, family life influenced their agency because it hindered them from being as hardworking in the IEI as they could be and sometimes caused them to blame themselves for not being good enough language learners, resulting in resistance practices among some participants, shown by not attending every day, skipping exams, or being less engaged in class. In addition, having a baby was another reason for not being able to continue in the program.

Third, cultural differences among classmates was a problem that limited the chances for some participants to work in group activities or practice speaking skills with non-Arabic-speaking classmates. Therefore, some participants showed resistance practices, such as being silent in class, sitting alone in the back, or participating less in

groupwork during class activities. On the other hand, the presence of students from a different nationality offered opportunities for other participants to practice English in class or at social events. Participants who were able to build a relationship with Americans, such as neighbors, classmates, or conversation partners, increased their confidence by encouraging themselves to practice speaking and became familiar with the L2 culture.

Finally, the times when speaking courses were scheduled were unsuitable for the participants because they needed to compromise between their IEI courses, their language needs, and their family responsibilities; therefore, some students became less interested in the IEI, grew disappointed, and dropped out.

Dependent Students

According to the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM, 2013), a dependent student is a student who is enrolled in a language institution or in any training programs but not a degree-seeking scholarship program. Furthermore, such a student is a Saudi accompanying the main scholarship holder (participants' husbands) to the assigned country of scholarship. Those students are part-timers sponsored by the Saudi government. This sponsorship covers a monthly allowance, health insurance, and language institution fees separate from the main scholarship holder's allowance and fees. However, they are called dependent (in official papers, Form I-20, and visa application) because they hold an F2 visa and the length of their stay, location, and study depends on the main scholarship holder (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 2013).

In this study, the participants were female dependent students accompanying their husbands in the US. They studied English in the same area where their husbands'

universities were located. However, they had the choice to stay home or drop the courses at any time. Studying such students was important because no previous studies had discussed their educational and social challenges as mothers, wives, and students. In addition, their Islamic identity as represented in their style of dress (typically a hijab or niqab) and their attitudes toward socializing with male students in co-educational classrooms might influence their language learning process and adjustment in the US. Therefore, this study sheds light on how such students construct and negotiate their Islamic identities to cope with the new environment and how they find opportunities to invest in learning English both in the classroom and through socializing with American people. Dependent students resisted pressures put on them in and out of the classroom, but this resistance was not always identifiable or direct. The current study carefully examines the construct of learner resistance from the experiences and perspectives of these four women and offers new understandings of the role of resistance in adult language learning as the women opened new spaces for learning in response to the unique constraints they experienced.

Background on Scholarship Programs in the US

American universities host the highest number of international students in the world (IIE, 2015). According to Hofer (2009), Saudi scholarship programs started in 1950 with only 13 students enrolled in American universities. In the 1980s, the number of students increased to 10,440 (IIE, 2015). Scholarships to the US declined during the Gulf War but increased in the 2001/2002 academic year due to the recovery of the Saudi economy (Hofer, 2009). However, due to the political situation between Saudi Arabia and the US following 9/11, the number of students noticeably decreased for a few years

to only 3,000 students in 2004/2005.

In 2005/2006, King Abdullah started a scholarship program that allowed Saudi students to study at American universities (Hofer, 2009). Thus, the number of Saudi students in the US rose by 14% more than the previous year, and by 129% in 2006/2007 (IIE, 2015). The number of Saudi international students has only increased since 2006, while in 2014/2015, there were 974,926 international students enrolled in US universities, 6.1% of which were Saudis (Al Ramadan, 2016). As a result, Saudis became the fourth largest population of international students and occupied the highest number of Middle Eastern students studying in the US (Al Ramadan, 2016). The latest report from the Saudi Ministry of Education in 2017 revealed that the total number of Saudi students in the US had reached 66,400 (male: 49,766, female: 16,634). The number of dependent students, male and female, was 35,570, with 4,179 of them enrolled in academic studies (Saudi Ministry of Education, 2017).

Although the King Abdullah Scholarship Program sponsored students' research, studies about Saudis studying in the US are not proportional to their large population in the US, and published studies are mainly doctoral dissertations (Al Ramadan, 2016). Al Ramadan mentioned that there have been quite a few quantitative studies (e.g., Akhtarkhavari, 1994; Alfauzan, 1992; Al-Ghamdi, 1985; Al-Harthi, 1987; Al-Jasir, 1993; Al-Khedaire, 1978; Al-nusair, 2000; Alshaya, 2005; Al-Shedokhi, 1986; Al-Shehry, 1989; El-Banyan, 1974; Jammaz, 1972; Mustafa, 1985; Oweidat, 1981; Rasheed, 1972; Shabeeb, 1996) that focused on Saudi students' experiences in the US. However, using statistical techniques might not be suitable to explore their context and situation. Al Ramadan added that there are fewer qualitative studies (e.g., Aljubaili, 2015; Alshahrani,

2014; Al Musaiteer, 2015; Fallon & Bycroft, 2009; Heyn, 2013; Hofer, 2009; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Midgley, 2009a, 2009b) and that mixed-methods studies were the least common (e.g., Aifan, 2015; Muyidi, 2015). This qualitative study explores the learning and socializing experience of four female Saudi dependent students, focusing on the role of maintaining Islamic identity, how this identity created learning and socializing challenges, and how dependent students who were also parents invested in the English classroom.

Statement of the Problem

According to Norton (2012), motivation is not the only thing a learner needs to be a successful learner. It is more important to be able to know how to invest in the learning process. Norton (2013) explained that "Inspired by the work of Bourdieu (1991), the construct of investment signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice it" (p. 6). Furthermore, Norton argued the following:

> If learners "invest" in the target language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic resources (language, education, friendship) and material resources (capital goods, real estate, money), which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital and social power. As the value of language learners' cultural capital increases, so learners' sense of themselves, their hopes for the future, and their imagined identities are reassessed. Hence there is an integral relationship between investment and identity, an identity which is theorized as multiple, changing, and a site of struggle. (p. 6)

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In the current study, the participants' primary goals were to learn English and focus more on speaking skills; therefore, the investment included practicing English by attending social events, talking with people in public places, talking with a conversation partner, and socializing with neighbors or classmates. As mothers and wives, they also chose morning classes that allowed them to take care of their families while studying in the IEI. However, because of their Islamic identity, their investment practices were influenced by people's attitudes toward their clothing and their male socialization practices.

Furthermore, when students move to a new country, they experience a different social, cultural, and academic environment that influences the adjustment process and language acquisition. Therefore, they need to adjust to the new culture, classroom environment, and teaching and learning styles to become part of their new social world and engage in the educational process. They also need to socialize with people to practice the L2 and gain a deeper knowledge about the culture. Since the participants were Saudi women, their prior religious socialization, adherence to cultural traditions, and perceived gender differences were considered important factors that might make the learning process difficult. Another important problem was that the participants were married and had children and as a result had family responsibilities that could make the learning process (or engagement and investment in the IEI) harder. Therefore, it was important to look at how these women balanced their investment in family responsibilities with language learning.

Study Objectives

      This empirical study is important because it focused on two important topics in the field of applied linguistics: learning English and identity. It is unique as no similar study has been conducted involving female dependent Saudi students in the US to explore the relationship between gender, learning, students who are parents, agency investment, and identity construction for female Saudi Muslim students in the US. Saudi dependent women's situations are unique compared to other mothers who are students enrolled in English programs in the US because the Islamic identity of the participants caused challenges that sometimes hindered them from socializing in the L2. In addition, the study examined how visa status intersected with motivation and investment for these students in learning the L2 and the institutional, social, religious, academic, and cultural factors affecting L2 learning inside and outside the classroom. Finally, this study expanded upon Saudi studies in TESOL and applied linguistics by drawing attention to the importance of social and religious factors on the learning process of female Saudi students in the US. As a result, their family obligations and learning expectations were brought to the foreground.

      Because of the great number of Saudi English as a second language (ESL) students in the US with limited time to study English, one goal of this study was to help them understand the importance of how to invest in learning English rather than looking for motivations to help them become better language learners. It also explored the relationship between learning a language and learner identity. Furthermore, this study could help English institutions and tutors at American universities better understand dependent students' unique context by describing their situation, needs, and obstacles and

offering suggestions for teaching times, materials, and social and academic activities that could help them learn English more effectively. Finally, the study could help the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education by suggesting necessary courses for dependent students to motivate them to learn the L2 and engage in the host culture.

Research Questions

Resistance is often framed as refusing to learn or participate in learning communities and is considered an impediment to language learning (McKay & Wong, 1996; Miller & Zuengler, 2011; Morita, 2004; Talmy, 2008). However, resistance can also facilitate language learning (cf. Fogle, 2012). The participants' religious beliefs, family responsibilities, and the nature and availability of IEI courses resulted in a new type of language-learning resistance. Focusing on agency and identity in this study helped explore two types of language-learning resistance that shaped different learning processes for participants. One was resistance as disengagement in the classroom, which led one student to be regularly absent, fail exams, sit alone, and be uninterested in class interactions and activities. The second was resistance to Islamophobia and discrimination when experiencing a new culture. This form of resistance resulted in a highly motivated language learner determined to learn English to be more aware of how to respond to negative and positive attitudes of people in the target culture. Finally, the study showed that a learner could maintain a strong Islamic identity and cope with a more open, Western environment.

These types of resistance could not be found in other contexts because Saudi women on dependent visas are in a unique position when their government offers them a chance to learn English in one year or stay home. If they do well learning English, it

means they know how to invest in learning English during this one-year period. In addition, their religious identity, appearance, family responsibilities, and other social constraints could keep them from learning English. These women experienced discrimination and difficulties in their studies and came up with creative ways to deal with those challenges. Finally, although the four women were strongly tied to their Islamic values and practices, they found ways to learn English outside the classroom that allowed them to maintain their Islamic identity while improving their language skills.

The study sought to address the following research questions:

1. How do participants construct cultural, social, and linguistic identities in relation to language learning in the US?

2. What social, cultural, educational, religious, and socioeconomic factors constrain or afford opportunities for participants' agency to be invested in learning English in the US?

3. What role does resistance play in learning and socializing in an IEI?

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first examines research related to identity, agency, and their relation to L2 learning. Definitions of and studies related to identity, agency, and investment are also included, as well as studies and perspectives on the learning challenges of international students, such as culture shock, social relations, homesickness, and discrimination. This work is important to contextualizing the experiences of Saudi dependent students because it looks at the language learning investment of parent-students and their learning and socializing experiences in a mixed-gender environment. The second part gives background information on the Saudi scholarship programs and explores research that has examined Saudi students and discussed Saudi perceptions about life in the US, gender and language learning, adjustment challenges, and academic challenges. It is important to mention that most of the studies cited in the literature review conducted on Saudi students in the US were part of dissertations.

Motivation or Investment

In the field of SLA, motivation is considered a fixed characteristic that influences the ways in which L2 students learn and the outcomes in the learning process. While motivation is important, the construct itself does not take into account the dynamic nature of students' engagement with learning processes. It further does not account for the role of societal constraints on learners. In motivational models, the assumption is that if one fails to learn a new language, that means the learner does not have enough desire to learn (Norton & Toohey, 2011). However, the present study focused more on the concept of

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investment than on the students' motivation because a highly motivated student is not necessarily a good language learner (Norton, 2012).

Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Gardner (1985) introduced two concepts of interest here: instrumental and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation is the learners' desire to learn a target language for the purpose of improving their living situation, e.g., getting a job. On the other hand, integrative motivation is the learners' desire to learn the target language to socialize and communicate with others. However, these two types of motivation fail to explain the complicated relationship between language learning, identity, and power relations (Norton, 1995). When Norton (2000) observed four immigrant women in Canada, she found that highly motivated students were not necessarily good language learners. Therefore, she came up with the construct of investment. This concept is focused more on how the social and historical relationship is constructed between the L2 and the learner's desire to learn (Norton, 2012). The word investment is used because "the construct of investment offers a way to understand learners' variable desires to engage in social interaction and community practices" (Norton, 2012, p. 6). Norton elaborated on another reason:

> A learner can be a highly motivated language learner but may nevertheless have little investment in the language practices of a given classroom or community, which may, for example, be racist, sexist, elitist, or homophobic. Thus, despite being highly motivated, a learner could be excluded from the language practices of a classroom, and in time positioned as a "poor" or unmotivated language learner. (p. 6)

Therefore, it has been shown that some language learners invest their ability to

learn by being silent in the language classroom. Duff (2002), for instance, conducted a study in a multilingual secondary school in Canada. She found that when the teacher gave non-local students the option to speak in class, they became afraid of making mistakes in front of native-speaking classmates. She noted that "Silence protected them from humiliation" (p. 312). However, native speakers interpreted learners' silence as "a lack of initiative, agency, or desire to improve one's English or to offer interesting material for the sake of the class" (p. 312). It was thus awkward for the teacher to offer more opportunities for non-local students to speak. Duff maintained that some students resisted their subordinate position verbally while others preferred to be silent as a way to invest their ability and engage in written class activities. On the other hand, language learners being silent does not necessarily mean they are motivated; the real reason could be that they are not invested in classroom practices (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Norton (2010) emphasized the following:

> If learners "invest" in the target language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital. Unlike notions of instrumental motivation, which often conceive of the language learner as having a unitary, fixed, and ahistorical "personality," the construct of investment conceives of the language learner as having a complex identity, changing across time and space, and reproduced in social interaction. (p. 4)

The construct of investment was important because this study looked at how female dependent students facing social, cultural, and linguistic challenges were looking for opportunities offered by their families or their IEI to invest their ability as mothers

and wives to learn English and, in at least one case, fight Islamophobia and discrimination. Thus, it was important to consider not only motivation but also the social and historical relationship between the dependent students' desire to learn and the process of language learning in American society.

Skilton-Sylvester (2002), for instance, conducted a study on four immigrant Cambodian women learning English in an ESL classroom in the US. The study explored learners' roles as spouses, mothers, sisters, daughters, and workers, focusing on how their identities were addressed in the classroom and how this influenced their participation. Therefore, focusing on motivation was not enough to explore their participation because it was necessary to look at the complexity of their lives. The findings showed they could shift their identities as mothers, wives, or workers in class as a way to invest themselves and participate in classroom activities.

In the present study, investment was an important concept because the four women faced many challenges, such as family responsibilities as wives and mothers, discrimination against their Islamic practices and appearance, and trying to compromise between their learning needs and taking care of their families. Therefore, it was important to look at how they found ways to invest in learning English despite disappointing and discouraging moments during their learning experience.

Identity and SLA

Individuals learn second and foreign languages for different purposes, such as earning a degree, conducting research, living in another country, finding a job, and for personal reasons. Regardless of their reasons, learners construct different identities during

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the process of learning an L2 (Anwaruddin, 2012). Wenger (2000) defined identity as follows:

> An identity is not an abstract idea or a label, such as a title, an ethnic category, or a personality trait. It is a lived experience of belonging (or not belonging). A strong identity involves deep connections with others through shared histories and experiences, reciprocity, affection and mutual commitments. (p. 239)

In the present study, a strong Islamic identity played an important role by influencing the participants' way of learning in class and outside the classroom. For example, for Saudi Muslim female students a co-educational environment was undesirable. Therefore, when they experienced this type of classroom, some students remained silent in class because of the presence of male classmates or to avoid groupwork and communicating with male classmates. These practices influenced the language learning process and their grades and sometimes hindered them from achieving their learning goals.

In the language learning process, a learner constructs new and complex identities that depend on multiple factors, such as gender and social class (Wenger, 2000). Identity is important to understanding SLA processes. Traditional psychological studies have considered SLA as a cognitive process only. On the other hand, recent studies have focused more on the role of sociocultural factors that influence the learning process (e.g., Lantolf, 2000; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). The call for a focus on identity and language learning are important for understanding the learning processes of adult learners, especially those who may find themselves in learning situations where certain identities are constrained and leave learners feeling marginalized. In addition, a large number of

studies have focused on identity and language learning (e.g., McKinney & Norton, 2008; Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Norton, 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2002; Ricento, 2005).

Based on Weedon (1997) and Bourdieu's (1991) poststructuralist theory, Norton (2012) found that identity was not fixed; it was always negotiated and subject to change according to social and cultural factors. Norton found that highly motivated learners need not be good language learners. Therefore, she introduced the construct of investment to better understand the language learner's "variable desires to engage in social interaction and community practices" (Norton, 2012, p. 6). According to Norton (2010), "investment must be seen within a sociological framework, and seeks to make a meaningful connection between a learner's desire and commitment to learn a language, and their changing identity" (p. 4). Since the participants in the present study aimed to improve their speaking skills, it was important for them to know how to find the most effective ways of practicing English that did not conflict with their Islamic values.

Norton's (1995, 2000) research was the foundation for most later adult identity studies in SLA. She studied immigrant women in Canada to investigate the relationship between identity and language learning. The story of the four immigrant women of Norton's (2000) study reflected their complex experience and mixed feelings about themselves as L2 leaners and how their new identity was shaped. Their stories demonstrated the difference between identity, which is related to the social factors around the learner, and agency, which is the ability to perform an action to pursue a goal, and how these two constructs were closely tied. It also showed the effect of learners' agency on shaping new identities that matched their new learning situation and life experiences.

The constraint of investment was also introduced by Norton (1995, 1997, 2000, 2001) as a new concept in the field of language learning. As a result, SLA studies have focused more on the relationship between the language learner and the social world. This relationship includes the social, historical, and cultural factors that offer or hinder opportunities for the learner to use an L2 in a new context. In addition, some researchers have looked at the relations of power in the classroom that can help or hinder learning an L2 as well (Norton, 2012). Norton (2012) expanded upon this concept:

It has been argued that the extent to which a learner speaks or is silent, or writes, reads, or resist, has much to do with the extent to which the learner is valued in any given institution or community […] language is [thus] more than a system of signs; it is a social practice in which experiences are organized and identities negotiated. (p. 1)

Some participants in this study showed resistance practices because they encountered negative attitudes about the way they looked, such as avoiding groupwork, remaining silent in class, and sitting alone in the back, and some avoided interaction with teachers in the presence of male students. Finally, some were regularly absent and failed exams because the co-educational environment was uncomfortable for them. These participants moved to live and study in a new country and culture, which influenced the construction of their social and linguistic identities. In addition, their circumstances also shaped their attitudes toward learning English and the importance of socializing with English speakers. Therefore, this research looked not only at the learning challenges in the IEI but also considered the circumstances around each participant through in-depth examination of interview and class observation data.

Definitions of identity. SLA research has offered multiple definitions of identity. Duff (2012) defined it as "one's connection or identification with a particular social group, the emotional ties one has with a group, and the meanings that the connection has for an individual" (p. 415). Norton (2000) defined identity as "how people understand their relationship to the outside world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future" (p. 410). Gender, religion, social class, and race also influence one's identity, which in turn can make the learning process easier or more difficult.

Language learning is connected to identity formation because, as mentioned earlier, L2 learners form multiple identities. However, some of these identities conflict in the learning process. Therefore, it is important to focus on the student's investment to uncover the reasons behind why some learner identities are more valuable than others. Before the 1990s, some studies focused on the relationship between identity and language learning (e.g., Block, 2007), but sociocultural theorists emphasized the relationship between language learning and socialization (e.g., Anwaruddin, 2012).

Informed by Norton's (2000) work, the present study explored how female Saudi students maintained their Islamic identity or constructed new identities after moving to study in the US, as well as how they resisted the learning process in the classroom. On the other hand, it also looked at how participants could find ways to invest in learning English to ease their learning process, socialize with Americans, and adjust to the culture.

Atay and Ece (2009) argued that "the relationship between language and identity is complex, contradictory, and multifaceted, dynamic across time and space, co-constructed, contextualized in larger processes that can be coercive or collaborative, and

linked with classroom practice" (p. 26). Participants in this study included Turkish

English teachers enrolled at the Department of English Language Education of a public

university in Istanbul and were prospective teachers of English at the same time. They

were aware that they had multiple identities, and although they had Western, Turkish, and

Muslim identities, they preferred Turkish and Muslim as their primary identities.

However, they did not feel that the Western identity threatened their Turkish or Muslim

identities but was rather a means to learn English. In addition, it helped them become

more aware of the differences between cultures and change some personal characteristics,

such as becoming more flexible with others. As prospective English teachers, they

believed that the teacher played a crucial role in transmitting Western values in the class

because cultural values might influence the students depending on how the teacher

presented those values. The findings from these teachers could be relevant to Saudi

dependent students in the US because both participants were female students who had an

Islamic identity that might influence their learning opportunities in US classrooms.

However, these Turkish teachers had dual identities that helped them invest in learning

English, while the Saudi participants in the present study maintained one (Islamic)

identity, which created some challenges in the language classroom.

      Agency and SLA. Agency and identity have become important concepts in SLA

(Duff, 2012; Norton, 2013) as they can explain why some learners are more successful in

L2 learning contexts than others. According to Duff, agency refers to "people's ability to

make choices, take control, self-regulate and thereby pursue their goals as individuals

leading, potentially to personal or social transformation" (p. 417). Ahearn (2001) defined

agency as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (p. 112). This means that

learners' agency is subject to the social and cultural circumstances that can give them power or hinder them from being part of a community or activity. Ahearn gave an example of some studies about language and gender that reflected the influence of the social world on the language. For instance, Goodwin (1990) wanted to explore if there were differences between male and female speech according to activity. Girls displayed different types of speech according to their purpose when talking together. However, when they talked with boys, they either used the boys' way of talking or spoke in a higher register.

On the other hand, Duff (2012) stated that "agency can enable people to actively resist certain behaviors, practices, or positionings, sometimes leading to oppositional stances and behaviors leading to other identities, such as [a] rebellious, diffident student" (p. 417). A resistance agency could result in learners becoming passive students (Duff, 2012). It could also lead them to practice oppositional activities in class, as in Talmy (2008), who studied English learners in a Hawai'ian high school to investigate why they resisted being positioned as ESL students in their ESL class. According to the class observation, resistant students showed oppositional activities, such as leaving their materials at home, talking with friends in class, and playing cards. Ahearn (2001) considered "resistance" to be a type of agency. She explained that there are different types of agencies, such as oppositional agency, complicit agency, or agency and intention, which may overlap during a given action.

Several studies, such as Zuengler (1989) and Siegel (1991), have found a strong relationship between SLA and learners' identity and agency in terms of their choosing how to invest themselves in the target community. The relationship between agency and

L2 learning is important because the present study focused on participants' agency during their learning process and how social and cultural circumstances, such as speaking and socializing with native speakers, shaped their agency and worked toward practicing the L2. Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) and Fogle (2012) explained that agency is never an individual property but rather a constructed and negotiated relationship between the individual and society. These studies were important for defining how Saudi student agency was constructed and negotiated in an American social and academic context. Since some students potentially resist studying for social, ideological, cultural, or religious reasons, the negotiation of student agency is important in the L2 learning process.

Language-learning resistance. As mentioned above, studies among English language learners have shown that in ESL classes, it is common to have resistant students who show oppositional activities in class (e.g., Talmy, 2008). Morita (2004) explained that "the co-construction of the learner agency and positionality is not always a peaceful, collaborative process, but is often a struggle involving a web of power relations and competing agendas" (p. 597). As a result, some learners struggle, having a resistant agency that hinders them from becoming part of L2 practices and communities and marks them as passive or noncompliant members. Therefore, it is important to understand the different types of agencies to determine the reasons for students resisting the learning and adjustment process. Miller and Zuengler (2011) explained that the ESL classroom could be a rich environment for resistance because language classes could create a conflict between the language and cultural ideologies.

Escandon (2004) mentioned that "Resistance is manifested in many students' disruptive behaviors or practices" (p. 6). According to Escandon (2004) and McVeigh (1997, 2002), these practices and behaviors might be the students' position in the classroom, e.g., sitting in the back or away from their classmates. It could also be seen when students made no eye contact with the teacher or spoke too low to be heard. They also found that resistance could be seen when some students were absent repeatedly or did not attend the day of evaluation, as in the case of adult ESL students enrolled in classes. Furthermore, students might not respond or pretend not to know the teacher's instructions or questions, appear ignorant, and forget important materials or assignment deadlines. Finally, they found that some students showed rude practices and behavior, such as excessive lateness, making noise, using their mobile phones, or chatting during lecturers.

Morita (2004) conducted a study with six female ESL students from Japan and 10 of their instructors in a Canadian university. The aim was to examine how students negotiated their participation and engagement in the ESL classroom. Morita found that students' participation was influenced by the classroom's social, cultural, historical, curricular, pedagogical, interactional, and interpersonal context. She also realized that silence did not reflect less interest in class participation but rather could be a way of engaging in cognitive, effective, and social activities in class.

Heyn's (2013) study also explored male Saudi students' experiences at American universities. The findings showed that some Saudi students expected the educational system to be strong and provide high-quality learning and that Americans were friendly. However, others were afraid of racism and discrimination because of their religion and

ethnicity. They reported feeling inadequate and embarrassed and faced prejudice. On the

other hand, studying in the US changed their perceptions about women and other

cultures, especially American culture, leading them to be more accepting of women and

more open to other cultures.

Agency was important in the present study because when participants moved to

the US, they could have certain expectations about life there that conflict with the actual

cultural, social, and educational challenges to their learning goals. Participants could also

find themselves motivated to learn English but because of certain aspects of their

religious and cultural identities, they might not be able to invest in learning or socializing

in English-speaking environments.

Saudi student perceptions about life and education in the US. Several studies

have explored the perceptions of Saudi students when moving to the US. Shaw (2009),

for instance, focused on the strategies that helped Saudi students achieve their goals and

the differences between Saudi and American academic environments. First, Shaw found

that Saudi students came to the US for multiple reasons, such as earning a degree, gaining

an education, becoming proficient in English, becoming independent, and learning about

American culture. Second, although before they came to the US they believed it was a

well-developed country, they expected America to be unsafe because of criminals and

unfriendly people. However, after living there, their expectations changed because they

found people were friendly and respectful. Movies and other popular media may have

reflected a more negative image than what they experienced, but Saudi students revealed

that communicating with people and making friends was the hardest thing to do.

Therefore, they mostly interacted with Saudi students more than Americans.

These findings were taken into account in the present study, as female Saudi students were anticipated to have similar perceptions about life and education in the US, which could influence their agency as English learners. Therefore, it was important to consider how their perceptions about life in the US shaped their identity and influenced their agency to learn and socialize in American society.

Gender and language learning. Unlike the women of past generations, female international college students are preparing themselves for a career and plan to enter the workforce in their home country rather than remaining in the homes of their parents or husbands. This change in the role of women in many places in the world has an impact on the forging of their emerging identities (Alruwaili, 2017). Kim (2011b) maintained that recently there has been a growing number of young women around the world who pursue their graduate and undergraduate studies in Western universities. As a result, they leave behind their native language, culture, and individual identity before engaging in another culture with a different language (Kim, 2011b). These international students often form a new identity or modify a previous one to cope with their new situation (Alruwaili, 2017). Kim (2011a, 2011b) found that identity maintenance was influenced by three factors: nationality, culture, and family. Based on Kim's (2011b) study on Asian women, there could be a relationship between studying in Western countries and changes in beliefs, attitudes, ideologies, and behaviors, such as individuals becoming more understanding of people from different countries and cultures.

Al Morshedi (2011), for example, conducted a study on Saudi and Emirati students in the US to examine their cultural and educational challenges. The findings indicated that the role of Saudi men and women sometimes changed from their roles in

Saudi Arabia. Men, for example, had to prepare meals and clean the house while women did their business by themselves outside the home. Another challenge was that students had insufficient background about the target culture. Therefore, it was hard to understand a joke or some phrases in casual conversation due to poor cultural knowledge. Finally, it was hard for women to talk to and deal with men because they were unaccustomed to it. This study is a good example of Saudi women's attitudes toward co-educational classrooms, as it showed how some participants had problems working with men in groups or participating in class because of the presence of male students. This could in turn influence the learning process in class and socializing with people outside of class.

It is worth mentioning that immigrant students can shift their identity when they experience a new culture and country (Alruwaili, 2017). Al-Ghamdi (2015) conducted a study on Saudi students who spent six to 10 years in the US. He found that over time, students developed "dual-cultural" identities. In other words, they valued elements of both Saudi and American cultures, which was reflected in their everyday life. Alruwaili (2017) added that this often appeared among female Saudi students in the US as their cultural expectations and roles could vastly differ in American culture. As any international students, female Saudi students experienced academic and social challenges that influenced their stay and study in the US. In another study, although all ESL students shared similar issues regarding culture shock and learning challenges, such challenges were more pronounced among female Saudi students (Altamimi, 2014). Altamimi found several "additional cultural differences that had a major impact on performance" for female Saudi students (p. ii):

Firstly, Saudi women – even those with university education – are unaccustomed to co-educational classes and male teachers. Secondly, Saudi women are expected to defer to males. As such, the presence of males in the classroom causes Saudi women to remain silent. Thirdly, Saudi women are not expected to interact outside the home, or with males. As such, Saudi women socialize only with Saudi women and do not have the opportunity to practice speaking. (p. ii)

Midgley (2009b, 2011) identified related issues regarding student support. These studies showed that female Saudi international students were completely dependent on their husbands for support, both financially and emotionally. Alqefari (2016) conducted a study about the difficulties that faced female Saudi students studying abroad. He found that they looked to their husbands for help and felt more confident and protected in the presence of their husbands in a foreign environment.

Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) conducted a qualitative study about factors that helped female Saudi international students adjust to their new lives in the US. They found that students' level of English proficiency was a key factor in their adjustment process. In addition, women found it difficult to interact with Americans in everyday life, holding conversations, and making friends if they felt unconfident about their English skills. Another highly influential factor in their adjustment was the quality of their social support and relationships with others, which included social support from friends and family in Saudi Arabia and the US. Although Saudi women often found it hard to make friends and have close ties with Americans, those who did form relationships with Americans were better adjusted to their life in the US. One interesting finding was that many women reported changes in their identity after living in the US,

and others reported an increase in their open-mindedness, independence, and tolerance. Although they originally came with the intention of pursuing their education, they felt they learned from US culture and changed in the process.

As mentioned above, "certain aspects of the Saudi woman's cultural identity, like covering her head and avoiding interaction with men, can impose difficulties on her learning an L2" (Alqefari, 2016, p. 235). This means that the Islamic identity represented by how Saudi women look and behave with men might influence their interactions in class with male and female students and teachers who have a poor knowledge of Saudi culture. Therefore, dependent Saudi students might face difficulties regarding groupwork, giving presentations, or attending social events in the IEI. It might also offer them fewer opportunities to learn and practice English.

Saudi students' adjustment challenges. Culture shock is part of the adjustment process that most international students, including Saudis, must face (Al Ramadan, 2016). Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) explained that when international students experienced a new culture, traditions, and values and could not practice their own, they felt that they had lost their own identity to cope with the new situation. This feeling could lead them to become isolated because it prevented them from expressing their needs, feelings, and goals to their classmates or teachers. Although orientation sessions prior to arriving in the US are important to help Saudi students adjust (El-Banyan, 1974), Al-Shedokhi (1986) believed that regardless of whether students attended orientation in Saudi Arabia, they all faced adjustment difficulties with English.

Moreover, Saudis have a more collectivist culture that makes social support crucial because they depend on each other when performing a task (El-Banyan, 1974).

Therefore, when they move to the US, they lose this support system, which makes their adjustment process harder. However, they can eventually adjust to the more individualistic US lifestyle and maintain positive attitudes toward their Saudi traditional cultural and values (El-Banyan, 1974). Abdel Rezak (2012), for instance, studied the transition challenges that influenced Saudi students' performance and adaptation. He found that Saudi students experienced stereotypes about their religion, race, and country from the media that made them feel angry and depressed. One of the participants said, "After a while, I started to limit my talk about both Islam and Saudi Arabia unless it is really a necessary talk that is needed for the discussion" (p. 100). Other challenges included teaching methods, assignment load, and the teacher's expectations. In addition, the most difficult aspect of adjustment for Saudi students is often reported to be English proficiency (Al Ramadan, 2016; Heyn, 2013; Shabeeb, 1996). Heyn (2013) added that culture shock, homesickness, loneliness, and health issues were the biggest difficulties Saudi students encountered in the US.

Al-Khedaire (1978) studied Saudi attitudes toward American culture. Although this study is old, it has some important findings pertinent to the present study. Since three of the dependent students' in the present study had lived in a small city before moving to a big city, it was important to know how this affected their adjustment and socialization attitudes. Al-Khedaire found that students studying at a small college or university had more positive attitudes toward the US than those at a larger college or university. In addition, marital and socioeconomic status influenced their perceptions about Americans and American culture.

When establishing social relations with Americans, Saudi students face many barriers, such as religious practices, isolation, gender, and food restrictions. In addition, there are other restrictions that make it harder for female students to attend or participate in social events, such as the presence of alcoholic drinks, food made with pork, and wearing a hijab because they feel unwelcome and judged. Furthermore, when Saudi students face educational problems, they prefer asking their classmates, teachers, or Saudi friends for help.

Hofer (2009) found that Saudi students suffered from the weather changing, restroom facilities, and American food. However, a longer length of stay was associated with a more positive attitude toward English proficiency and living issues. Moreover, students believed that social activities arranged by the university were helpful because they allowed them to make friends from different countries, talk about their own culture, and learn about other cultures. As a result, they preferred going on more field trips and sports activities to meet other people. As language learners, they also wanted a conversation partner to improve their English and reflected that their learning and living experience in the US made them more organized, independent, and self-consciousness.

Al Ramadan (2016) stated that even though Saudi students were given free airfare back to Saudi Arabia "every nine months, problems—such as difficulties procuring a visa, immigration regulations, body searches in airports, and impatient airport personnel—led Saudi students in the US to be fearful and anxious when traveling home during breaks" (p. 48). These problems are potentially getting worse for families who have children and need to visit their families during long breaks, which might increase feelings of homesickness and isolation (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015).

Al Musaiteer (2015) found that Saudi students were encouraged to communicate with Americans who appreciated their religion and cultural values. Therefore, communicating with Americans and understanding cultural differences are major factors that have been shown to help Saudi students adjust to life in the US (e.g., Abdel Razek, 2012; Heyn, 2013; Hofer, 2009). However, after 9/11, the relationship between Saudis and Americans was damaged and students faced discrimination and isolation problems (Ghaffari, 2009). As a result, some students left the US and others changed their appearance, such as men who shaved their beards and women who stopped wearing a hijab (McMurtrie et al., 2001). There were also problems applying for an American visa, high fees, and issues in the airport, such as lengthy entrance and fingerprinting regulations, which were viewed as unwelcoming (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Although these studies were important, they did not focus on dependent students' roles as mothers and wives and how different their social and academic challenges might be. Therefore, it is important to look at these students' experiences with classmates and teachers as part-time students and parents, their ability to cope with differences between Saudi and American culture inside and outside the classroom, and the constriction of their identity at home as mothers and wives and in class as students.

Educational challenges. Female Saudi students have been shown to encounter different academic issues that might be due to many factors, such as religious beliefs and practices, culture, educational system, and the role of teacher and student in class. One of the most common issues has been co-educational classes (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010; Altamimi, 2014; Alqefari, 2016). It is important to consider that Saudi students are separated by sex from elementary school through high school and in most university

courses (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 2016). In addition, teachers from elementary to high school teach the same gender (Al-Otaibi, 2004; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 2016). Therefore, co-educational classes are often the first obstacle they face in the classroom (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010; Shaw, 2009). For female Saudi students, the presence of male students has been a barrier hindering them from participating in class activities, and as a result they have tended to be silent instead of active students because their anxiousness influences their learning process (Alqefari, 2016). Altamimi (2014) asserted that female Saudi students were not used to being in classes containing male students and being taught by male teachers. Furthermore, "Since they were expected to defer to men in their home country, the presence of male students in the classroom caused Saudi women to remain silent in class" while beyond the classroom, they tended to socialize "only with Saudi women," causing them to have "less exposure to an English-speaking environment" (p. ii).

On the other hand, when Kampman (2011) studied female Saudi business students in the US, she found that having opposite-sex classmates was not a problem. The students coped with this change because when they had traveled abroad in the past, they had to deal with men. In addition, it was important for them to learn English to know how to deal with men in the business world. The present study on dependent students looked at these difficulties in terms of the roles of mother and wife because they potentially faced difficulties since their learning goals were different and their length of stay was shorter than university students, which might make them less encouraged to learn the language. Finally, they had to compromise between their responsibilities at home and as students in class.

Another issue is that class activities in the Middle East are based on individual work. However, American classrooms often have students operate in teams to complete an assignment or activity. Therefore, groupwork is another difficulty for some Middle Eastern students because the technique is different from what they are used to and requires communicating more with classmates (Derderian-Aghajanian & Wang, 2012; Mahrous & Ahmed, 2010).

Al-Sibai (2005) pointed out that female Saudi ESL students were afraid to lose face in class and they did not feel secure or confident, which impacted their language learning process. These feelings prevented them from participating in classroom oral activities and using English in public. As a result, they had fewer opportunities to practice what they had learned. However, writing and reading activities were much easier than speaking.

Mustafa (1985) examined differences between married and unmarried students' attitudes toward academic problems that Saudi students faced. This study was important to the present study because dependent students were married and might suffer from different academic and social problems as well. In addition, Mustafa also considered the impact of length of stay, which might create educational problems for Saudi students, as well as the case of dependent female students. Students found that giving a presentation (cf. Al Morshedi, 2011), class discussion, and writing assignments were the most difficult tasks. In addition, unmarried students tended to socialize more with Americans, which helped them do better on their exams than married students. Married students did not practice English as much because they used Arabic with their wives. Lastly, students who studied for a short time had more problems writing essay exams, taking notes, and

understanding the educational system. Shaw (2009) added that the requirement for full-time status was a struggle for most international students. Moreover, dependent students might have different attitudes because they were part-time students according to the immigration regulations. Therefore, it was important to look at part-time students' requirements and how they fulfilled the dependent students' needs as mothers.

On the other hand, when Al Morshedi (2011) examined academic challenges faced by Saudi and Emirati students, he had different findings. From his survey, 64.7% of participants could participate in class even though their English level was low. However, he found that writing was the hardest skill. Therefore, students tended to take writing courses and go to the writing center to improve their writing. He also found that the schools back home did not prepare them before studying abroad. They also suffered from linguistic difficulties, such as having a thick accent. Other Saudi students found that the easiest tasks were listening/speaking, taking notes, and studying, whereas the most difficult were writing/reading and English grammar (Shaw, 2009).

Finally, the teacher's role can also be a challenge because in Saudi Arabia the teacher is viewed as an authority figure at the center of the class who does all the speaking (Al-Otaibi, 2004; Barnawi, 2009). Therefore, in one study, students lacked conversation and interaction skills and tended to memorize material, which is not always helpful when learning a language (Al-Otaibi, 2004).

The literature on agency, identity, investment, L2 learning, and adjustment challenges have served to contextualize dependent students' identity, adjustment, and learning issues. This was important because the present study focused on the role of maintaining one's Islamic identity in co-educational classrooms and how this identity

might conflict and create socializing and learning challenges for the female participants. Furthermore, the study explored different agencies that might result in oppositional or engaging practices inside the classroom. Finally, it examined how parents as students achieved their learning goals by finding ways to invest in learning and practicing English that did not conflict with their Islamic values or family responsibilities.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In SLA textbooks, identity is often framed in terms of the social dimensions of a language learner rather than the most effective individual factors (Duff, 2012). Most identity studies have used qualitative approaches, such as narrative inquiry, and theories ranging from interpretive to post-structural to critical (Duff, 2008). Creswell (2017) defines qualitative research as "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or a human problem" (p. 4). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), "qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency" (p. 14). Since the learner's identity and agency investment (see Ahearn, 2001) are influenced by the circumstances around the learner, this type of study requires a qualitative approach in which the researcher can come to understand the contextual factors of individual learners' experiences.

Therefore, the present study employed ethnographic methods to gain a fuller, more in-depth understanding of the research topic. According to Creswell (2017), ethnography is "a design of inquiry coming from anthropology and sociology in which the researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviors, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time" (p. 14). In addition, for this type of methodology, the data are normally collected through observation and interviews (Creswell, 2017). Therefore, the data in this study were collected through semi-structured interviews, class observations, and short weekly follow-up interviews.

These methods helped uncover trends in thought and opinions to dive deeper into the research questions and understand the contextual nature of participants' language learning resistance, adjustment, and socialization. The researcher's role in this study was to delve into the experiences of participants to give a more accurate and detailed picture of opportunities and constraints they have experienced while learning English in the US. In addition, the researcher has interpreted the meanings others have made about the world from their own lived experiences (Creswell, 2007).

This study used a qualitative collective approach to investigate the lives and educational trajectories of four Saudi women who came to study in the US as dependent students with their husbands, who were the main scholarship holders. Furthermore, using both methods helped look at the issue in different ways (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this study, dependent students were selected as participants because they had made sacrifices, such as not completing their degrees back home and leaving their family and life to be abroad with their husbands for at least two years. They also faced linguistic and social challenges to adjust to their new life in the US. During this adjustment process, they were also responsible for their children and housework. This study used qualitative methods for two enrolled participants and two who had dropped out of classes because the researcher sought to compare their different learning and adjustment experiences in-depth and look for reasons that might hinder the students who dropped out from learning English at the institution. Furthermore, the study explored the learning experience of the enrolled students to examine their language socialization processes with classmates and teachers when learning and practicing English inside and outside the classroom, as well as their adjustment to American culture.

The researcher selected only female participants for many reasons. Saudi Muslim women have specific issues that are not experienced by other groups of women or by Saudi Muslim men as discussed in the background section above (Altamimi, 2014). These issues are mostly related to the way women look, especially those who wear a hijab, and how they interact with others. Such women must cope with moving from a more conservative community to a freer, more open one, which could cause social, religious, and educational challenges. Alqefari (2016) added that these aspects of Saudi women's identity, such as their garb and avoiding interaction with men, might influence their learning process. Women were also studied separately because of the huge differences in the influence of cultural norms on female vs. male Saudi students' personalities and actions (Altamimi, 2014). These differences influenced their views on groupwork with male students, co-ed classes, social events with non-Saudi students and teachers, and establishing relationships between men and women outside the classroom. In addition, since 2015, there has been a growing number of female sojourners (Al Ramadan, 2016), yet there has been no focus on this group of students despite their different situation caused by their visa type. Therefore, this study explored the needs, learning challenges, and adjustment situation of current sojourners to draw more attention to the unique needs of this group and help future students learn and socialize in the new culture.

Finally, it was easier for the researcher to collect data from female participants due to cultural norms against interviewing participants of the opposite sex (Ismail, 2012). Since the researcher and participants shared the same cultural background, it was easier for the researcher to understand the difficulties that might be encountered when

interviewing female students. For example, it would have been harder to meet male students at home or in a private room because of religious norms against Muslim women being alone with a male nonrelative. Conversation between the researcher and a male student might also have been less comfortable, more conservative, more serious, and have made it difficult to use eye contact and speak plainly and directly, which would not help in extending the interview questions and in talking freely.

Therefore, choosing female participants made it easier for the interviewer to have more comfortable conversations, laugh, and make eye contact. In addition, the researcher shared some characteristics with the ESL students, including gender, culture, religion, and nationality, as well as being a parent and student, which gave the researcher insight into participants' cultural and linguistic context. Since the researcher was a female Saudi student but in a higher educational status with a different educational experience, there was nothing in common between the participants and researcher that might be considered a downside.

Participants were divided into two groups. Group 1 consisted of two students who had been studying but dropped out of the English institution without finishing all their courses before the research was conducted. Group 2 consisted of two students who were already enrolled in and studying at the English institution while the research was conducted. The aim was to track their language learning process by observing them in class and by conducting interviews to explore their adjustment experience in the US.

Recruitment

Group 1. The two participants who had dropped out were mainly recruited with the assistance of the Saudi Students Club in Memphis, Tennessee. The researcher

contacted the club president to ask for students who fulfilled the study requirements (see Appendix D) and to email the recruitment script to potential candidates in the mid-south city. The recruitment script, researcher's contact information, and information about the research project were included in the email to ensure that each potential participant understood the project before deciding whether to participate or contact the researcher if interested.

The researcher received calls from two students who could participate. However, when it came time to schedule the interview, one refused to participate when she realized that the interview would be recorded and refused an interview with the researcher if notes would be taken. She did not want to talk about her experience because she believed it was personal and should not be exposed in a study. Another participant could not continue due to her health situation. The researcher then tried to contact other potential participants through the monthly meeting of Saudi students. However, these students were preparing to leave the US because their husbands had graduated. The researcher asked for their phone numbers to contact them to arrange an interview. The researcher used WhatsApp to arrange a suitable time for the interviews and conducted the interviews with them through FaceTime since they had moved back to Saudi Arabia.

For the two students who had dropped out of classes, it was easier to conduct video interviews because they had moved back to Saudi Arabia at the time of collecting the data. In addition, they were the best candidates for the study because they learned English in US language institutions, were parents, and had no problem sharing their experience through a video call, as well as because no alternative participants were available in the US. The interviewer recorded their voices only after asking permission.

Group 2. Enrolled students were mainly recruited with the help of the English institution director (see Appendix B) because it was easier to find a list of enrolled students in this way because the Saudi club did not have access to all female Saudi students. The researcher emailed the IEI director with the study goals, participant requirements, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval form. The director emailed the names and emails of female Saudi students enrolled in the fall semester, in addition to the names of the teachers who agreed to let the researcher observe the students in their classes. The researcher emailed the students directly to ask if they would be willing to participate. After two of them agreed, the researcher asked them to email their phone numbers in order to contact them and explain the study in detail, their role, and the data collection methods. The participants agreed to be interviewed and observed in class. Next, the researcher contacted their teachers to ask permission to observe their classes (see Appendix C) and contacted the IEI director to arrange an observation schedule that would not influence the students' evaluation. However, the researcher had a difficult time arranging interviews because participants were busy with their classes, homework, tests, and house and family duties.

Participants

Participants consisted of four dependent students, i.e., female students holding an F2 visa and accompanying their male guardian (a husband in all four cases) to study in the US. Those students could study English at any language institution as long as it was in the same area as their husband's university, and institution fees were all covered by the Saudi Government. Furthermore, these students had the option to stay home or drop their courses at any time. The length of stay and study was limited to that of their F1 partner.

Table 1 presents each participant's group, age, family size, previous education, and length of stay in the US.

Table 1

Description of Participants

Participant	Group	Age	Children	Level of Education	Years in the US
Alya	1	24	1	BA in Information Technology in Saudi Arabia	18 months
Layla	1	30	2	Pursuing a BA in English Language and Translation in Saudi Arabia	7 years
Alma	2	26	1	BA in Islamic Studies from a Saudi university	5 years
Huda	2	29	3	BA in Public Administration from a Saudi university	2 years

Note. Each course lasts for two months. Students who hold an F2 visa can study at a language institution for 12 months.

Furthermore, these participants had experienced a similar American classroom context and learned ESL at an American institution. All of them had thus gone through the same experience in terms of studying English and participating in language exams. Participants were from an upper middle-class background. They all received a government scholarship that offered a monthly stipend, paid for health insurance, and covered all educational expenses. They also lived in similar upper middle-class neighborhoods in a mid-south city in the US. Participants had to meet the following selection criteria:

- Be 20 or older.

- Speak Arabic as a first language.

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- Be female Saudi dependent students (i.e., hold an F2 visa). All participants were married because the F2 visa is usually given to wives according to visa regulations.

- Have lived with their spouses (i.e., holders of an F1 visa) in the US for at least six months to ensure they had sufficient time to begin the adjustment process and be able to speak about their social and educational experience in the US.

- Have completed at least one semester in the English institute in question to be able to talk about their language learning experience and challenges.

Confidentiality

Participation in this study was voluntary, and recipients of the recruitment notices were in no way obligated to participate. All information gathered for the study was provided by participants. Identifying information about participants was removed from the data. In addition, all data collected were deleted from the recording device after uploading said data to the researcher's password-protected computer and stored on a password-protected hard drive. Participants chose pseudonyms, which were used in transcribing the audio recordings and reporting the data.

Data Collection

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used because the researcher wanted to have a clear focus on the issues to be addressed and discussed with the interviewees while giving interviewees a chance to freely reflect on their perspectives and attitudes (Heigham & Croker, 2009). An interview is a qualitative method suitable for this study because it provides detailed information about the participant's personal perspectives and helps understand the study context in order to look more closely at each participant's

experience (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2003). The data collected thus provided important insight about the participants' beliefs, perceptions, identities, agency investment, and attitudes toward American people, culture, and classrooms (Heigham & Croker, 2009). Interviews were employed to collect the data to explore specific personal, educational, or historical answers directly from participants (Creswell, 2007).

These included long semi-structured interviews and short follow-up interviews. The interviews were conducted in Arabic, because the participants' English proficiency was low. However, they were transcribed into English for coding.

Group 1 interviews. Members of Group 1 participated in one semi-structured interview each, both of which lasted 45 min and were audio-recorded. These interviews touched on their background, learning experience, experience moving to a new culture, adjustment challenges, expectations about life in the US, and their situation as dependent Saudi students in terms of learning needs and goals (see Appendix A). Since these two participants had already returned to Saudi Arabia, their interviews were conducted through FaceTime. Before the day of each interview, the researcher sent the consent form by email, which each participant signed and sent back. On the day of the interview, the researcher sent a message through WhatsApp asking the participant if she was ready. Since seeing facial expressions is important during an interview, the researcher asked the participant if she would be comfortable with a video call. During the video call but before conducting the interview, the researcher explained the study goals and the participant's right to stop at any time or to ask for an explanation of any question.

Video call interviews. Video calls have become a great solution for conducting semi-structured interviews, especially after video calling applications have become

accessible virtually everywhere. Video interviews are a good alternative to in-person

interviews for many reasons. First, verbal communication, such as body language and

facial expressions, can be seen on screen, which is important for the study analysis

process (Opdenakker, 2006; Shuy, 2003). Second, they are a good way to reach

participants if they are not in the same place as the interviewer. They are also free

because the interviewer does not need to travel to meet the participant or conduct a phone

interview lacking in nonverbal communication cues. Voice and video recording are also

available in some applications, which make the process of data analysis easier. On the

other hand, video interviews can be difficult in the absence of high-speed Internet access

required for a clear video. In addition, some participants prefer not to have video calls

because they do not want their face to be recorded or seen through the camera.

Group 2 interviews. Participants in Group 2 had two 45-min semi-structured

interviews each, which were audio-recorded. The first interview was conducted before

the researcher observed the participants in class. The aim of this interview was to have an

overview of the participants' background, learning experience, goals, and expectations, as

well as the challenges they faced in a US classroom and in socializing with classmates

(see Appendix E). The second interview also lasted 45 min. It was conducted after each

class observation was finished. This interview included questions about the participant's

academic achievements, learning outcomes, and suggestions for female dependent

students (see Appendix E). The researcher contacted each participant by phone to set up a

place and time that would be suitable for her. The participants preferred to have the

interviews at a Starbucks café. Before each interview, the researcher explained the study

goals and the participant's right to stop at any time or to ask for an explanation of any

question, after which the participant signed the consent form. This group of participants

also had 15-min follow-up interviews during which the researcher took notes. These

interviews were usually conducted after each class observation to ask them about their

performance, challenges they faced each week, and what they had learned (see Appendix

E). The aim of these interviews was to track the participants' learning achievements

during the semester, explore their learning challenges every week, and look at how they

coped with school and house duties. Table 2 presents the data collected from each

participant, including interviews and class observation sessions.

Table 2

Data Collection

Participant	Group	Interview Session	Duration	Class Observation	Duration
Alya	1	Aly1	45 min		
Layla	1	Ly1	45 min		
Alma	2	Alm1	45 min		
		Alm2	15 min	obs1	1 hr 20 min
		Alm3	15 min	obs2	1 hr 10 min
		Alm4	10 min	obs3	1 hr 20 min
		Alm5	45 min		
Huda	2	Hu1	45 min		
		Hu2	13 min	obs1	1 hr 50 min
		Hu3	12 min	obs2	1 hr 50 min
		Hu4	12 min	obs3	1 hr
		Hu5	10 min	obs4	1 hr 50 min
		Hu6	10 min	obs5	1 hr
		Hu7	13 min	obs6	2 hr
		Hu8	15 min	obs7	2 hr
		Hu9	13 min	obs8	2 hr
		Hu10	13 min	obs9	2 hr
		Hu11	10 min	obs10	2 hr
		Hu12	45 min		

In-person interviews. In-person interviews are the best method for collecting

qualitative data because the interviewer is in the same context, time, and place as the

interviewee. In-person interviews help the interviewer feel, observe, and record non-

verbal communication of emotions—such as anger, confusion, or happiness—about answers, which can result in richer data (Opdenakker, 2006; Shuy, 2003). Interviews are enhanced by being associated with observation in order to have more knowledge of the participant's context and situation. On the other hand, in-person interviews could be difficult to arrange due to obstacles such as long working hours, exams, assignments, or family duties. Therefore, a good alternative would be video interviews that can be done at home. For the enrolled students in this study, the interviews were conducted face to face because the participants and the interviewer were in the same city, and it was only possible to arrange an appointment with them on the weekends because of their exams and assignments. Finally, since the interviewer observed their classes every week, it was much easier to conduct short follow-up interviews after class with the two participants.

Class observation. Observation is "the conscious noticing and detailed examination of participants' behavior in a naturalistic setting. In applied linguistics, this can include a classroom or teachers' room, or any environment where language use is being studied" (Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 166). The purpose of the observations was to help the researcher become part of the context study and be able to look closely at the students' participations and interactions with teachers and classmates in addition to investigating the adjustment process associated with social and cultural factors (Ritchie et al., 2003). Therefore, class observations were only conducted for Group 2 because their learning experience was analyzed to look for factors that hindered or encouraged them to learn and socialize. It also helped the researcher find the relationship between the interview discourse and actual practices in class. In other words, it demonstrated the actual class practices as they were applied in contrast to what was expected or assumed

would occur (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994). Finally, observations allowed the researcher to explore topics or behaviors that would be uncomfortable to discuss in the interview (Creswell, 2017). For example, in the interview, the student might not be comfortable talking about some attitudes in class, such as being embarrassed about talking in front of male students or not cooperating with peers or the teacher in class; however, during observation, the researcher noticed these behaviors and discussed them with the participants in the second interview.

The researcher observed the participants once a week for two months. The observation took place in a language institution at the University of Memphis. Each class period lasted two hours. The classes were reading/writing, grammar, listening/speaking, and intermediate conversation. The researcher arranged the sessions according to class schedule, excluding exam and break days, and participants' attendance. After receiving permission from the institution, the researcher contacted participants' every night to make sure they would be attending. The researcher also contacted the teacher to make sure there would be no exam on that day. During observation, the researcher attended the class and sat in the back to better observe the participant. Observations about the participant's learning interactions and social attitudes during the class were recorded in notes.

The researcher took notes on a word processer and created a table to organize the notes that included the date, course name, class time, educational interactions, social interactions, and short interview (see Table 3 as an example).

Table 3

Sample of Observation Notes

Date	Class	Education Interactions	Social Interactions	Follow-Up Interview
9/22	Reading / Writing 9:00-10:50	• The class starts with groupwork to discuss their paragraphs. • She is speaking English and discussing her comments clearly with her group. • She is trying to explain her points to the group by giving examples to clarify her point. • The teacher chooses her to explain the meaning of a new word "various" and she answered correctly "a lot of." Also, she answered, "available" and said, "able to."	• She sits in the front. • She listens to the instructor and follows the rules in the group activity. • Huda is very engaged with her group, discussing her points. • Although the students' group makes rounds and changes, she is doing well talking and commenting on their paragraphs.	I: How was your week? P: I had a good week except that I have a grammar exam and I worry about it. I: Did you learn something new? P: The vocabulary as usual. I: Did you face any challenges? P: Doing homework late at night is hard. I have three kids and my husband is busy studying. I need to memorize new words, write a paragraph, and do grammar homework that need concentration and time. Another challenge is the way the teacher gives a lesson. I don't like her way because she is talking more than she gives activities. I: Is there anything else you want to talk about or tell me? P: Yes, the groupwork. I prefer to work alone. I like to have clear instructions from the teacher then the time to think and work with no pair distraction.

On the day of the observation, the researcher wrote details about student participation and interactions during class, such as participating with the teacher in a discussion, answering questions, giving a presentation, ways to practice English in class, discussing or commenting on an issue, and doing an individual or group activity. In addition, in the social interactions table, the researcher recorded the student's attitude with male and female classmates in class, performance, seating position, and attitudes

toward the teacher's instructions and toward Arab students. The researcher focused on these elements because they offered insights when answering the research questions related to learning and socializing attitudes in US classrooms. After class, the researcher conducted a follow-up interview as mentioned above. The researcher analyzed the observation notes in the same way the interviews were analyzed by using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages, which are described in the following section.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a process of making sense of data through consolidation, interpretation, and meaning-making (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). According to Merriam and Tisdell, this process can take place by coding the data, which is a method of assigning short-hand symbols to different elements of the data. For this study, data obtained through interviews and class observations were analyzed using the thematic analytic approach. Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). This method was used because it is flexible and provides a wider scope of data. It is widely used because it is not specific to a theory, method, or field of study (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is also suitable for a new qualitative researcher because extensive experience is not required, and it is easy to comprehend and apply (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013).

Stages of thematic analysis. The researcher analyzed the data in six stages (see Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Stage 1: Familiarization with the data. In this phase, the researcher transcribed the interviews and observation notes. Since the interviews were in Arabic, all transcripts

were translated into English. Below is part of a transcribed interview from the Aly1 interview:

> I: I meant when you first came, what were your expectations? What was the first city you moved to? Was it big or small?
>
> P: Umm [pause] I first lived in Gainesville near Orlando, I faced culture shock. I was not happy, I cried most of the time, I was scared. But after that, I loved it and I enjoyed it. I mean I love the environment.
>
> I: So you immediately studied the language?
>
> P: Immediately [smile]. From the first week.

Observation notes including the student's educational and social interactions in the class were also transcribed. However, the researcher only coded the learning attitudes and social interactions. Below is an example of social interactions in the observation notes:

> Huda was hesitant to join her group because they were male. They did not ask her to come and she hesitated to join. But then they spoke together. Again, the teacher asked the students to talk in groups, but Huda was working alone and her group worked together. They contained two Arab men, and she was the only woman. Huda moved to another spot to join a group containing a man and a woman to discuss a speaking activity. (Huda, obs6)

The researcher read each transcript several times to make sure nothing was missed. After establishing the accuracy of the transcripts, the researcher moved on to the coding stage.

Stage 2: Generating initial codes. A code in qualitative research is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or

evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 3). The researcher used Nivio to create codes for all interviews and observation notes. Through this application, the researcher highlighted key statements and phrases to create codes relevant to the research questions. Below are examples of an interview transcribed with the code:

Code# People's attitudes toward hijabs:

"I never got a strange attitude toward my look except once from a boy who was asking his parents about why I looked like that." (Ly1 interview)

Code# agency investment as a parent student:

"When my husband was at the university, I used to go to the mall or coffee shop alone and try to talk. This helped me a lot to speak like them and know how to reply." (Ly1 interview)

The researcher made sure that the codes were comprehensive and accurate to create suitable themes. The initial coding process generated 48 codes. After reading and comparing them, the researcher decreased this number to 43 (see Table 4).

Stage 3: Searching for themes. A theme is a "unified and understandable pattern that emerges from the data and relates to the research questions" (Al Ramadan, 2016, p. 62). The researcher created themes for codes that focused on a topic and avoided developing themes with insufficient data, as demonstrated in the example below:

Codes# peoples' attitudes toward hijabs, participant's attitude toward co-educational classes and relationship between men and women.

Theme# Saudi female identity.

The researcher went through all themes to ensure consistency and coherence, resulting in

nine themes, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Codes and Themes

Theme	Example
Saudi female identity	"I do not like to have groupwork with men."
	"I can participate in a social event if most of the participants are women. This is comfortable for me as a Saudi woman."
Agency investment to learn English	"It was easy for me to become a student and a housewife because I used to finish earlier than my husband then come home to cook and prepare everything before he came home, and I didn't have kids at that time."
Reasons for dropping out	"Since the middle of the semester, I started thinking about dropping out. When I felt the courses were hard and I was absent a lot, I thought about dropping them and taking a break then enrolling again."
	"I dropped out because I was about to deliver my first baby…"
IEI issues	"Having different nationalities represented in class helped me use English to deal with people of other nationalities."
	"The institution's attendance rules were suitable for me because I did not have to be absent. The part-time hours were also suitable for me."
Language learning issues	"I have problems with memorizing new vocabulary and writing a summary."
	"I cannot speak if there are men in general and women too. My husband told me, 'do not be afraid or embarrassed; you are all learning.' I tried many times but I couldn't."
Socialization attempts	"The first six months were so hard. I was scared and very sad. That's it. I used to meet my friends and they were nice. We were like sisters. They really made my moving to the US much better. "
Observation limitations	"After five minutes of class, there was a fire drill, so we had to leave the class. So the teacher told me he might give a lesson if there was time after the fire drill."
Learning and social attitude in class	"I sit in the back alone because I am not interested in the class or in attending, especially in the last month."

Stage 4: Reviewing themes. In this stage, the researcher compared the themes with the codes to ensure that the themes were truly related to the data. In addition, the researcher made the general themes more specific to analyze the data more closely. Finally, the researcher excluded any theme that was not useful for describing the original

data or did not have sufficient data description. For example, the researcher included the codes under themes (i.e., expectations and perceptions about life in the US) that were related to how the participants perceived social life in the US to the "socialization attempts" theme because the codes of the first theme were related to socialization.

Stage 5: Defining and naming themes. The researcher justified each theme in relation to the data and illustrated how this relationship could answer the research questions. This stage "served as a definitional section for each theme in terms of how each theme related to the broader narrative and research project as a whole" (Al Ramadan, 2016, p. 62). This stage is included in Chapter 5 (findings and discussion).

Stage 6: Writing the analysis. The researcher started writing the analysis by focusing on the relationship between the data and research questions. Al Ramadan (2016) explained that "This process contextualized the data for the reader providing a robust presentation of the themes as an entire story" (p. 62). Therefore, the researcher focused on writing the most important assumptions and themes by explaining them clearly and maintaining consistency in the language and concepts. This stage is included in Chapter 4 (data analysis).

Conclusion

This study used qualitative methods to examine each case in-depth and understand the participants' subjective experiences that influenced their learning trajectories, which are often left out of quantitative or survey studies. In addition, the qualitative approach was more practical for this study because there were no places (e.g., a lab) or instruments necessary to collect the data (Creswell, 2017). Class observation was suitable because in qualitative approach, the data are collected where participants are

experiencing the given issues (Anderson et al., 1994). In addition, the observation data helped triangulate the interviews by demonstrating whether the participants' perceptions of their own learning classroom behaviors were true. Post-observation interviews helped verify the researcher's interpretations. The two participants from Group 1 were not in the US, so the researcher conducted their interviews through FaceTime. Students in Group 2 were busy due to their domestic responsibilities coupled with their schedule as students, so the researcher based the interview locations and times on what would best fit their daily situation.

Furthermore, since participants faced challenges in learning English and socializing in US culture, the researcher explored their internal and private resistance reasons by looking at their in-class performance as well as social, cultural, and religious factors that intersected with learning an L2 and socializing in US culture. In doing so, the researcher observed their behaviors and actions in the class context, had face-to-face interactions, and talked to them directly to learn about their experience, perspective, and challenges regarding the issue of interest (Creswell, 2017).

The study also focused on how dependent Saudi women invested their agency as wives, mothers, and students to overcome adjustment problems, such as culture shock, and other learning problems that could hinder their learning and practicing English at English institutions in the US. The study further considered how identity was fixed or fluid during the participants' stay and study in the US, with a focus on demonstrating how social, economic, and religious factors in Western countries affected female Saudi students' identity. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were deemed suitable for this study because the researcher could explore these problems by asking different questions

about the participants' personal background, culture, and educational experience in the US and Saudi Arabia, but participants were free to follow topics of their own choosing as well (Creswell, 2017). Finally, interviews and class observations were used because they allowed the researcher to "develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. This involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges" (Creswell, 2017, p. 186).

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

All four participants (Alya, Layla, Alma, and Huda) were Saudi women between the ages of 24 and 30 who had enrolled in an IEI in a large mid-south university in the US. These women were all mothers with dependent visas who had accompanied their husbands to the US through the King Abdullah Scholarship Program. These aspects of their lives affected their investment in the IEI in terms of the amount of time they could put into their classes, how long they could stay in the program, and how much they could practice English inside and outside the classroom. The students' roles as wives and mothers as well as their prior socialization and religious identities likewise intersected with their investment in the IEI. In this chapter, I present the experiences of each participant, including the challenges they faced during the process of learning English in an IEI and their different levels of investment in learning English. In addition, I discuss the language learning resistance they presented during their educational and social experience in the US.

Before talking about the experiences of these women, it is important to introduce some of their characteristics. All four were tied to one (Islamic) identity. According to Norton (2000), identity is "how people understand their relationship to the outside world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future" (p. 410). Islamic identity in this study means the identity constructed according to their religion, which was Islam. It influenced the participants' socializing and learning process in the US because they experienced a more open society that was different from their own and which contradicted some of their Islamic beliefs.

While Islamic identity could include many aspects of an individual's behavior and everyday actions—such as regular prayer, dietary restrictions, ways of interacting with people, parenting, and women's role in society—in this study, several aspects of the participants' Islamic identity and circumstances were extremely important to their language learning investment. The first was other people's attitudes toward their Islamic garb, as Alqefari (2016) believed that "certain aspects of the Saudi woman's cultural identity, like covering her head and avoiding interaction with men, can impose difficulties on her learning L2" (p. 235). Islamic garb here included wearing a hijab (covering the head and body) and a niqab (covering the face except the eyes). Because the participants continued wearing this garb after moving to the US, they faced some difficulties in class participation and interactions.

Second, in American classrooms, the participants (as Muslim women) were experiencing a co-educational environment for the first time, where the relationship between men and women was negotiable. As part of their religious beliefs, the four participants faced difficulties dealing with male students, which influenced their language learning investment in the IEI. Saudi women are not expected to interact with men who are not relatives (Al Morshedi, 2011; Altamimi, 2014), except in emergencies and when a woman is not available for them to talk to. They are also not supposed to touch, shake hands with, or accept a compliment about their appearance from a male student or teacher. In addition, if the student wears a niqab or hijab, she is not supposed to take it off in front of men in public, including in the classroom. As an example of how these norms constrain classroom interaction, if there is a group containing women and men in class, female Saudi students prefer working with their female classmates only. Moreover, if

they have to choose a conversation partner, they prefer a woman. The four participants

expressed their attitudes toward socializing with men inside and outside the classroom,

which was reflected in three situations: experiencing co-educational classes, groupwork

in class, and attending social events arranged by the IEI. These three situations were

important for the participants because they were part of their language learning process

and potential investment in the IEI classes.

Third, the participants were able to negotiate their identities in order to help

themselves learn and practice English because identity is not fixed; it is always

negotiated and subject to change according to social and cultural factors (Norton, 2012).

In this study, negotiating an identity means looking at how participants were able to

maintain their Islamic garb and limitations toward interacting with men while at the same

time adjusting to a co-educational learning context. I found that the four women were

different from Atay and Ece's (2009) participants. The Turkish EFL teachers in Atay and

Ece's study had multiple identities—such as Muslim, Turkish, and Western—that helped

them learn English and become aware of cultural differences. However, the four women

in this study felt strongly tied to one primary identity, their Muslim identity, which was

obvious, as mentioned earlier, from their garb and gender socialization behavior as well

as the attitudes they expressed in the interviews I conducted.

Fourth, the four women were "dependent students," meaning that their learning

experience was strongly linked to their role in the family as a wife and mother. Therefore,

it is important to look at how their family responsibilities constrained or offered

opportunities for them as dependent students to invest in learning English. It was likewise

important to consider how the students perceived their roles as mothers and wives

according to their cultural beliefs and how this influenced their language learning investment.

Finally, although self-confidence and agency are different, they were both important constructs for this study. Losing self-confidence might cause a student to develop a resistance agency against learning the language or speaking in front of others in class. In addition, since speaking was the most important skill for the study participants, it was important to look at the influence of self-confidence on causing resistance practices when speaking and participating in class. The four participants wanted to improve their speaking ability because it offered them opportunities to participate in class. Thus, I focused on the learning needs of the four women. Lower English proficiency can make international students lose self-confidence in their English skills (Al Ramadan, 2016), which can happen because they do not feel comfortable talking in front of others (Barratt & Huba, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Therefore, self-confidence influences student interactions and participation in language classrooms (Al-Hattab, 2006; Al-Sibai, 2005; Jamshidnejad, 2011), especially oral activities (Al-Hebaish, 2012; Al-Sibai, 2005). Most importantly, lower self-confidence resulting from low English proficiency might cause other problems, such as when socializing with people in public, asking for help, or ordering food at a restaurant (McLachlan & Justice, 2009).

In the following sections, I describe the experiences of Alma, Layla, Alya, and Huda by focusing on three elements: appearance and gender socialization, family responsibilities, and language learning needs. I also highlight two types of resistance: 1) resistance as disengagement from class activities and 2) resistance to Islamophobia and discrimination. Finally, I discuss the importance of aspects of religious identity in the

model of investment and language learning. Alya and Layla had dropped out of their IEI classes at the time of data collection, while Alma and Huda were still enrolled.

Alma: Non-Belonging and Resistance

Background. After giving birth to her first child, Alma moved to the US with her husband because he wanted to pursue an MA and PhD at a US university. Alma planned to learn English and then pursue her MA in Law. However, her daughter's health situation required more care, making it hard to enroll in an IEI. After her daughter recovered, she started the language program but faced many challenges that made her think it would not be easy to pursue an MA. Therefore, her goal was to speak English fluently in order to be able to socialize with people in the US. She described her hope when she first came to the US: "The language. I really wanted to be professional. That's all. And maybe the MA" (Alma, Interview 1. September 10, 2017).

Alma faced many religious and cultural challenges, including her daughter's sickness and unhappiness, having a busy husband, lack of sleep, negative attitudes from her Japanese classmates, and the presence of male students in class. These challenges influenced Alma's language learning investment and led her to show resistance practices, such as regular absences, skipping exams, avoiding groupwork, and not participating in class. Alma failed to pass the language courses and decided to drop out of the program before the study was finished because she was not able to invest in learning English. Thus, the oppositional agency that Alma's had was constraining the speaking opportunities for her to improve the language skill that she really needed. This was because part of her Islamic identity influenced her language learning investment in a co-educational classroom. I found that Islamic identity and cultural beliefs influenced her

participation and made her scared and less confident to speak in front of others and to fail to find comfortable ways outside the classroom to practice speaking.

Appearance and gender socialization. People's attitudes toward Alma's Islamic garb and her experiencing a mixed-gender environment were major problems that influenced her language learning investment in the IEI. These factors limited her opportunities to practice the language by engaging in class activities and interacting with classmates and teachers. Alma's first challenge in class was her perception of the Japanese classmates' attitudes toward her appearance. Since Alma would were a niqab (face covering) and hijab (head and body covering), her Japanese classmates displayed a negative attitude toward her appearance when she wanted to join groupwork with them, making her feel uncomfortable and unwilling to participate:

> My hijab sometimes causes a problem when I go to public places in some cities because people stare at me. But in the IEI it was okay. However, the first time my Japanese classmates saw me, they stared at me. I don't like having students from different nationalities, especially the Japanese, because they were not cooperative with me, sometimes I feel because I wear a niqab. The way they look at me. If there was something I didn't understand and needed to ask them in class, they underestimated me. This did not make me feel comfortable. (Alma, Interview 1, September 10, 2017)

According to the previous quote, Alma was expecting the classroom to be more comfortable than public places. She thought that teachers and classmates were supposed to understand religious and cultural differences. However, the negative attitude she perceived from her Japanese classmates made her disappointed and less comfortable.

During class observations, I noticed that Alma was sitting alone in the back and not involved in class discussion even if it was about the test. A relevant part of the observation notes is given in Table 5.

Table 5

Observation Notes on Alma

Date	Class/Time	Notes
10/9	Grammar 11:10-12:00	-Alma as usual sitting alone in the back. -The teacher started the class by discussing the last test and correcting mistakes. -She is not involved in the discussion. -Alma was busy with her book looking over the pages. -When I asked her after class why she was looking at her book ("Were you studying for your test because you will take it after class?"), she told me, "No, I do not feel what is he saying is important, so I look at the book and highlight some grammar rules so I can practice at home more and study by myself." She also told me that "he talks more than he explains and that bothers me in class. I don't learn grammar. I just wait for the class to finish."

As highlighted in Table 5, the feeling of not belonging in the classroom made her disengaged from class participation. In addition, Alma felt more comfortable learning grammar by herself in class because she felt the teaching methodology was not helpful to learn grammar, so she found that her attendance was not important either. I believe that there was a conflict inside Alma between achieving her goal to learn English and not accepting the learning context. Alma was not able to change her clothing to make her classmates accept her, and at the same time, she was not able to adjust to the cultural differences in the American class. This conflict affected her ability to learn grammar or benefit from the class discussion. Thus, the influence of the feeling of not belonging in class and the failed attempts to find ways to learn and participate in class made her language learning investment impossible and caused her to be absent.

Moreover, this was the first time Alma had experienced a co-educational classroom. Therefore, the presence of male students influenced her language learning investment in class, as she mentioned in an interview:

When I was in the foundation level, the class was mostly female. I liked it. I used to talk a lot with my classmates and socialize. But in the next level when I came the first day, the class was mostly male, so I didn't feel comfortable. I couldn't talk. (Alma, Interview 5, February 16, 2018)

As part of Alma's Islamic identity and cultural beliefs, speaking in front of men might not be acceptable. Alma was not able to speak because of many reasons. First, she always felt shy about speaking in front of men as part of her cultural and Islamic beliefs. Similar to Altamimi's (2014) participants, Alma found that the presence of male students caused her to remain silent in class and prevented her from participating:

I wish the classes were not mixed gender. Only girls, so I could feel free. I could take off my hijab and talk more easily. I could also speak with the teacher. When there are male students, I can't talk with the teacher. I feel scared, and I'm afraid I won't speak English well. (Alma, Interview 5, February 16, 2018)

When Alma said, "I could take off my hijab and talk more easily," this meant that she felt that wearing a hijab and having men in class were the main constraints that prevented her from participating in class activities. Therefore, when she experienced the American class, she was silent and less engaged because she was uncomfortable.

Second, she was less confident speaking because her language skills were weak; therefore, she wanted to save face and remain silent rather than practice the language. Although Alma was the most sensitive to the presence of male students, she did not

mention any problems from having a male teacher that constrained her participation or interaction in class: "I don't mind the teacher's gender because it's something that can't be changed" (Alma, Interview 5, February 16, 2018).

As part of practicing and learning English, the IEI arranged social events outside the campus in order to encourage students to exchange cultures and learn the language. However, Alma also believed attending social events outside the campus was not useful because of what happened when she attended a Christmas party once: "The people sharing the same language sat together and talked in their native language. So I couldn't impose myself on someone and join them" (Alma, Interview 5, February 16, 2018). She added the following:

> The IEI arranges social events, like a picnic, but if I went there, I would sit with Saudi students, not with the Americans or Japanese, because I couldn't get along with my Japanese classmates and I don't understand them. Maybe because my language is weak. But if there are men, I never talk to them. (Alma, Interview 5, February 16, 2018).

As mentioned earlier, Alma was not able to learn the language in class or participate in social events to practice the language. I believe Alma was not accepting cultural differences outside the classroom either. Her classmates were also making it hard for her to feel like she belonged in the language learning context, and they did not involve her by speaking or being open to learning about her religious and cultural beliefs, which seemed very important to her. There were also other reasons. First, her language skills were weak, so she was afraid to make mistakes and thus preferred to remain silent. Second, the presence of male students also constrained her opportunities to speak even outside the

classroom context. This indicated that Alma's Islamic and cultural identity was influencing her inside and outside the classroom and hindered her in learning English, which limited her chances for investing in learning English.

If a Saudi student always remains silent during class discussion, never joins groupwork, and always sits alone, this might be a result of the student feeling that she does not belong to the classroom context due to negative attitudes from classmates, mixed-gender groups, and perhaps the teacher not sufficiently explaining the material. Therefore, Islamic identity, including appearance and gender socialization, and not accepting the cultural differences in the American classroom can strongly influence the student's language learning investment in class.

Family responsibilities. As a dependent student, Alma came to the US accompanying her husband and child with a plan to study. However, she was expected to have more family responsibilities than her husband, which might have worked as a constraint on her investing in learning English in the IEI. Alma felt conflicted between her dream and her actual situation: "I really wanted to be professional in English" (Alma, Interview 1, September 10, 2017). However, she told me that after she came to the US, "It's hard. I don't know why. Is it hard? Or am I making it hard! Since I was in high school I've loved English, but after I came here the situation is different!" (Alma, Interview 1, September 10, 2017). Alma was motivated before she came to the US. She aimed to learn English, then pursue her MA in Law, but she came across some challenges as a mother, especially because her daughter needed many surgeries, which required Alma to stay at the hospital with her for a long time and take care of her because she was not able to walk like other children:

My plan was to change my visa to an F1, and my husband is supporting me, but I

see it's getting harder. I don't know why. Maybe because of my daughter's health

situation. Besides, when I was in Level 1 and Foundation, she [my daughter] used

to go to daycare. But now she doesn't like daycare, so I feel under pressure. She

cried every morning. (Alma, Interview 1, September 10, 2017)

From the previous quote, it seems that as part of her cultural beliefs, the role of

the mother can work as a constraint on her ability to achieve her learning goal. Therefore,

after enrolling in the IEI and feeling that she was under pressure from being a parent and

a student, she started blaming herself for not being a good enough language learner:

I want to learn the language. I want to pursue my MA. My father is the reason.

His dream is to see me learn the language and get my MA from the US. My

husband also helps me and motivates me to learn. He tried a lot but it's me. I

don't make an effort. (Alma, Interview 1, September 10, 2017)

Her daughter's health situation was a strong reason for her to think about dropping out

every morning:

This morning, I was thinking over quitting with my husband, but he encourages

me to study and finish this course. He pushes me to attend. Besides, if I drop out

now, SACM won't let me continue next semester. I'm not happy about what I'm

doing. I want to learn but I'm facing problems with studying and homework. My

daughter is having a difficult time adjusting to the preschool. She's crying all the

time and doesn't sleep well, and that makes me think about her a lot. (Alma,

Interview 2, September 29, 2017)

She also revealed later that she faced some family challenges that made the learning process harder:

> I want to say that there are some problems that made my learning process hard. In the beginning, my husband was very busy. I couldn't go to the IEI. When I first came, I had a little kid. I was scared to leave her at daycare or with a babysitter. The house duties and taking care of the family were hard. (Alma, Interview 5, February 16, 2018)

These quotes illustrated that it was not enough for the dependent student to be motivated from her family, especially her husband, but it is important that the family understand the pressure that comes from responsibilities for the house, children, and husband that can make her learning investment impossible. Alma's family life was a learning obstacle because she was unable to care for her daughter when she was sick and study at the same time, so at that time she did not enroll in an IEI. After her daughter got better, she had a difficult time going to the IEI because her daughter did not get used to being away from her in daycare. On the other hand, her husband was busy with graduate studies. However, he was very supportive of her and encouraged her to go to the IEI and learn English to achieve her dream. As mentioned above, every morning she wanted to drop out, and her husband motivated her to continue, but she still felt constrained. The reason was that Alma felt responsible for her daughter's unhappiness, although she was receiving support from her husband, which might have been due to her cultural belief that the mother and wife should be solely responsible for domestic life and that the family is the priority instead of the wife's future academic or professional goals. On top of that, she needed to

take care of her daughter since she was sick and deal with a busy husband. These factors contributed to making her less able to invest in the learning process.

When I asked her after class observation about her week, she always replied in a sad tone, "It was hard as usual" (Alma, Interview 3, October 9, 2017). Alma also mentioned other factors that made attending difficult: "I'm having a difficult time attending every morning because the university is kind of far away. I also don't sleep well so it's hard to wake up early. And since I was absent a lot, I feel lost" (Alma, Interview 3, October 9, 2017). Norton (2013) mentioned that "investment must be seen within a sociological framework, and seeks to make a meaningful connection between a learner's desire and commitment to learn a language" (p. 4). Although Alma had good moral support from her husband by pushing her to go to the IEI every morning, dropping her off every morning, buying books to help her learn new vocabulary, and helping her study for exams, she could not invest in learning English in class or at home because she felt that her family responsibilities prevented her from being a good student.

Alma's story is important for this study because it reflects the situation of many female dependent students who fail to invest in learning English due to their cultural beliefs about the mother and wife's role, which hinder them from achieving their goal of learning the language despite receiving strong motivation and support from family. Finally, her family obligations were a factor that caused Alma to be less interested in class, to be absent a lot, and to feel lost, which made her become disengaged from class activities and resulted in a resistance agency.

Language learning needs. Since the first time Alma came to the US, she considered speaking to be the most important skill because it could help her communicate with others more easily. She described her language skills when she first arrived:

My English wasn't good, but I could help myself by using body language. I understood what they were saying, but I couldn't reply. I needed to learn how to speak. I really needed that the most. Reading was okay. My vocabulary was okay. (Alma, Interview 1, September 10, 2017)

She also told me that "I wish I could speak more than I write" (Alma, Interview 1, September 10, 2017). When I asked her why, she said, "If I can speak good English, it will be easy. I believe it's the language. If I'm good at it, everything will be okay" (Alma, Interview 1, September 10, 2017). Although Alma believed speaking was the most important skill, she was not able to practice speaking inside the classroom, and when I asked her whether this was because of the presence of Saudi men only, she said, "NO. Men in general and women too" (Alma, Interview 5, February 16, 2018). However, the presence of male students was part of the reason for her to remain silent in class and prevented her from speaking.

Alma was also not able to speak with her classmates because she was afraid of making mistakes, even though speaking was an important skill for her: "My husband told me, 'do not be afraid or embarrassed; you are all learning.' I tried many times but I couldn't" (Alma, Interview 5, February 16, 2018). From the previous quote, even though Alma knew that the classroom environment was not comfortable to learn speaking because of the presence of men, she did not mention in the interviews that she tried to

find other comfortable ways to help her learn speaking since it was her ultimate goal from learning the language.

In the next section, I focus on the type of resistance Alma showed as a result of her feelings of not belonging in the learning context, negative attitudes toward her garb, and experiencing a new class environment, which all contributed to making her resist the language learning process.

Resistance as disengagement from classroom activities. It is common for some students to show oppositional actions in ESL classes (Talmy, 2008). Miller (1999) explained that the ESL classroom could be a rich environment for resistance because language classes could create a conflict between language and cultural ideologies. Escandon (2004) mentioned that "Resistance is manifested in many students' disruptive behaviors or practices" (p. 6). According to Escandon (2004) and McVeigh (1997, 2002), these practices and behaviors might be the students' position in the classroom, e.g., sitting in the back or away from their classmates. It could also be seen when students made no eye contact with the teacher or spoke too low to be heard. These studies also found that resistance could be seen when some students were absent repeatedly or did not attend the day of evaluation, as in the case of adult ESL students enrolled in classes. Furthermore, students might not respond to or pretend not to know the teacher's instructions or questions, appear ignorant, and forget important materials or assignment deadlines (Escandon, 2004; McVeigh, 1997, 2002). Finally, some students showed rude practices and behavior, such as excessive lateness, making noise, using their mobile phones, or chatting during lectures (Escandon, 2004; McVeigh, 1997, 2002).

In the current study, Alma displayed many of the oppositional or resistant

behaviors outlined above. For example, she was absent more than five times in a period

of six weeks, which was more than the absences allowed by the IEI attendance rules.

Alma was not doing well in the IEI because she was facing challenges in class, such as

her Japanese classmates' negative attitudes toward her clothing and the presence of male

students preventing her from participating. In addition, she needed to take care of her

daughter because she was sick. She could not get enough sleep, so it was hard for her to

wake early and come to class. In addition, her absences caused her to become lost in

class. After the semester was finished, I asked her if there were any learning problems

that made her absent a lot, and she said, "No. No. I used to be absent because of my

health situation. However, in the last month of this semester when they told me that I

might fail the courses, I just attended with no motivation" (Alma, Interview 5, February

16, 2018). She told me that she came only because she was afraid to pay a fine to SACM

if she dropped out before the semester was over.

During class observation, the grammar teacher told me that Alma would not pass

the course because of her attendance. Alma was aware of her attendance and educational

problems, such as doing homework or studying for the tests:

The reading teacher told me that I might fail the course because I didn't do well

on the tests. Besides, I was absent for four days from the grammar class, and the

teacher told me to be careful not to reach five absences. […] In the reading class,

we learn about 20 words every week, which is good. But I'm lazy. Maybe

because I've been absent. There are a lot of new vocabulary words that I can't

memorize. I can't even study for the test. (Alma, Interview 2, September 29, 2017)

She always blamed herself without doing something about it: "I've been absent for many days and I missed a lot." She felt conflicted between what she wanted to do as a language student and the difficult circumstances she was experiencing as she mentioned earlier. Alma was caught between the influence of her Islamic identity in class and the cultural beliefs at home regarding her role as a parent and student. This conflict influenced her investment in learning the language inside and outside the classroom.

I noticed that during class, Alma always sat alone in the back and was on her phone or looking around her book. When I asked her about the reason for this behavior, she told me, "Because each pair of students sits together, and in the last month I wasn't interested in the class and attendance wasn't important" (Alma, Interview 5, February 16, 2018). In addition, when the teacher asked her to join a group, she did not interact with the other members or discuss the groupwork, and when I asked her why, she said the following:

I feel uncomfortable with groupwork because I mostly work with Japanese girls who don't cooperate with me or help me discuss things with them. They like to work with each other and don't trust my answers. They rarely speak English. They prefer to speak Japanese with each other. (Alma, Interview 2, September 29, 2017)

This quote indicated that the Japanese students in her class played an important role in constraining her agency to complete the groupwork assignment or offer the chance for her to talk in English.

Alma was a good example of how the conflict between Islamic identity, cultural beliefs, and learning goals can cause a dependent student to resist learning English. According to Alma's experience, resistance as disengagement can occur when a student is facing learning difficulties in class as a result of being tied to a certain identity that is strongly controlling her classroom practices. Alma was strongly tied to her Islamic identity, and her appearance made other students avoid talking to her, which made her feel that she did not belong in the class. Therefore, she did not engage in groupwork and preferred to work alone in class. In addition, having male students in class caused her to be more silent and embarrassed to talk or interact with the teacher. Therefore, she had fewer chances to be involved in class activities and practice speaking English. Other factors, such as being responsible for her family's home life, also made learning the language difficult and pursing an MA even more so. As a result, Alma became disengaged from class activities and showed resistance practices, including being absent, failing exams, sitting alone in class, and having no motivation to come to class.

This all suggests that if the learning context contradicts a student's identity and the student is not able to negotiate his/her identity to find ways of investing in the language, there is a great chance that the student will be disengage from the learning context, show resistance practices, and drop out of the language program.

Alya: Negotiating Islamic Identity as a Path to Investment

Background. Alya was newly married when she moved to the US. She came with her husband because he wanted to learn English and then pursue an MA at an American university. She could not imagine how life would be and how she would be able to get used to the people and culture. Besides, her English was not good enough to

communicate with the people there. Alya could not adjust to her new life because there were a lot of new things happening in her life, such as getting married, holding new responsibilities, and leaving her family for the first time. She was also not able to finish her BA before coming to the US, which was also hard for her. In the first couple of weeks in the US, she reported being scared and cried most of the time. Therefore, she decided to enroll in an IEI from the first week in the US in order to take advantage of her stay and help herself by learning English and adjusting to the new life and culture. Unlike Alma, Alya was able to negotiate her Islamic identity to adjust to the new learning environment, such as wearing more colorful Islamic clothing to avoid negative attitudes from others, not sitting close to men in class, and using websites to practice the language instead of attending social events. Therefore, Alya did very well in the language program and was able to overcome the cultural differences inside and outside the classroom.

Appearance and gender socialization. Maintaining her Muslim identity while integrating in a Western society was difficult for Alya. This was because her garb caused some to display a negative attitude toward her as she heard negative words spoken about her from people in public, and people looked at her as a stranger. Alya was sensitive to these people's attitudes toward her clothing: "My outfit as a Muslim woman made it hard for everyone to accept me and talk to me" (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017). In class, however, she described the situation as more comfortable than she expected. Her classmates displayed a different attitude than people in public:

> I faced some racist people who said bad words to me, or the way they looked at
> me in public places was uncomfortable. However, my classmates were excited to

know more about my traditions and customs, especially my clothing. (Alya,

Interview 1, October 28, 2017)

This quote showed that unlike Alma's class, Alya felt that her class was more

comfortable because the students accepted her appearance, which made her feel

comfortable and at the end encouraged her language learning in class. However, Alya

also maintained that negative attitudes about her appearance on campus could cause

dependent Saudi women to be less invested in learning the language and might make her

quit studying because she expected less discrimination in educational environments. She

said, "The hardest part in terms of social integration was the clothing. It sometimes

prevented me from socializing with people, and it might make me quit studying" (Alya,

Interview 1, October 28, 2017). For Alya, people's attitudes toward her Islamic attire

could influence her learning because if she found herself in an unwelcoming learning

environment surrounded by people who did not appreciate her religious values, she could

be less encouraged to learn the language (similar to Alma's opinion), thus affecting her

language learning investment and providing a strong reason to drop out of the IEI. She

told me that when she went to apply to a community college (in Tennessee), the students

were looking at her as a stranger, which made her want to leave, and that she did not feel

encouraged to enroll there:

I: Do you think the niqab prevents you from socializing with them [other

students], or not?

P: Yes. Umm. I think it also depends on the city, state, and university. Sometimes

in some societies, it is uncomfortable or hard to socialize. For example, when I

wanted to enroll in a community college in [a mid-south city], I could not.

I: Why?

P: Because I just went to finish my registration but I did not like the way most of the students were looking at me, and they made me feel like I was a stranger. (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017)

Alya described herself as a "stranger" when she went to the community college because she was made to feel that she did not belong there as her clothing was not commonly seen there and because of the negative attitudes about it. In the IEI in contrast, she received fewer negative attitudes, especially among classmates, which gave her a greater sense of belonging. This belonging encouraged her to attend classes, make good grades, and nearly finish all language levels except the ones that SACM refused to pay for, ultimately causing her to drop out. For Alya, then, the acceptance of her appearance by others at the IEI was an influential factor in her early investment in that program.

As mentioned earlier, the study participants were experiencing co-educational classrooms for the first time, which could increase their anxiety and negatively influence their learning process (cf. Alqefari, 2016). However, Alya thought the presence of male students was not a problem for her in class:

I don't have a problem studying in a mixed environment since I stick to my values and my hijab and if these are allowed in the American classroom. Also, when teachers understand my situation, for example, I don't sit next to a male student, whether it is a language, BA, or MA classroom. Even if I need to do a PowerPoint presentation in class, I don't have a problem because of the way I look. I feel comfortable in the language classroom because we are all learning. (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017)

However, she felt that male students and teachers should show respect to her as a Muslim woman who cannot sit close to, shake hands with, or touch a man, as she said, "I don't mind having men in class or working with them if the environment is comfortable and respectful" (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017). She also added the following:

If the teacher knew I felt more comfortable working with women but always asked me to work with a male student. Especially if the male student did not understand the limits that a Saudi woman had and went beyond them. That is uncomfortable for me. (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017)

Therefore, if the teacher and classmates understand the cultural and religious values of a Saudi student, the learning environment will be more comfortable and there will likely be fewer instances of resistance practices. Alya here made a clear point that Saudi students expect the teacher to understand the values of female Saudi students toward male students, especially given the large number of Saudi women learning English in American classrooms.

Although Alya believed that a co-educational classroom was not a problem for her, she had a different opinion about attending social events outside the campus: "I can participate in a social event if most of the participants are women. This is more comfortable for me as a Saudi woman" (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017). Therefore, when the IEI arranged language student meetings, picnics, lunches, or a visit to a teacher's house, she never participated:

I couldn't go there because most of them were men. I didn't usually feel comfortable in an environment like that, even though there was no wine or alcoholic drinks. Sometimes I feel because of the way I look maybe no one wants

to socialize with me. I never ever participated in a social event. (Alya, Interview

1, October 28, 2017)

Again, the presence of male students and people with negative attitudes toward her

appearance were major factors that prevented Alya from participating in social events as

a way to invest in learning and practicing the language. Because her Islamic and cultural

identity influenced her learning opportunities outside the classroom, Alya suggested that

there should be other activities that would be easier for her as a Saudi Muslim woman to

participate in:

I think that the IEI could arrange social events that would be suitable for my

situation as a covered woman, such as arranging some activities on campus like

going to the library together or sitting and chatting in a coffee shop on campus

during break times. I think social media could also help because I can socialize

with others but through my phone or computer, such as Facebook and Twitter,

and discuss a topic in order to practice the language. (Alya, Interview 1, October

28, 2017)

It appeared that Alya believed that investing in a classroom, such as participating

in groupwork, giving a presentation in front of others, and interacting with the teacher

and classmates was more important than participating in social activities. The reason is

that she felt more comfortable in the class since her Islamic and cultural identity was

more respected than in any context outside the classroom.

International students can form a new identity or modify a previous one to cope

with their new situation (Alruwaili, 2017). Alya had a successful experience in looking

for ways to invest in learning English that were suitable for her situation as a Muslim

woman. She knew how to invest in learning English by respecting her Islamic and cultural identity while choosing what was most important and suitable for her to learn rather than to reject everything outright like Alma. I found that Alya felt very strongly about maintaining her Muslim identity, such as when she said, "I want to be myself and stick to my values and religion. I might change the colors of my hijab, but I won't be taking it off" (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017). While she was ready to engage in a Western society and enroll in an IEI to learn English, she was careful that this engagement not affect her religious practices, such as wearing a hijab. As a result, she compromised between her Islamic beliefs and adjusting to American society. She mentioned that she might change the color of her hijab because in Saudi culture some conservative Muslims believe that black is the only option and Saudi women often only wear black, but in the US, she understood that black might be less preferable. Therefore, she was open to choosing other colors, while keeping her face (except the eyes) and body covered, as a way of accommodating Western culture and negotiating her strong Islamic identity to try to lessen the discrimination she faced and encourage people to accept her appearance. Finally, Alya suggested other activities be held on campus that would make her more comfortable to practice the language outside the classroom but within an educational context. She also noted that she was happy to use a website assigned by the teacher that helped her practice what she had learned in class. This indicated that the influence of her Islamic and cultural identity did not stop her from learning but rather made her think of other ways of learning the language.

Family responsibilities. Alya experienced fewer family obligations because she did not have children when she was studying. She mentioned that "My husband helped

me and motivated me and we learn the language together" (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017). Similar to Alma, Alya's husband was also motivating and supportive of her to learn English in the IEI. She described how she coped with her new life in the US as a newly married student:

> It was easy for me to become a student and a housewife because I used to finish earlier than my husband then come home to cook and prepare everything before he came home, and I didn't have kids at that time. (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017)

Although Alya was a good example of a language learner, she was not able to finish the program: "I dropped out because I was about to deliver my first baby, which is the main reason. Besides, SACM won't pay for a new semester since I finished the full 12-month period allowed" (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017). When Alya dropped out of the program, she was not showing any kind of resistance to the classes or to learning English because, as mentioned earlier, she was able to compromise between her studies and house duties. Instead, having her first baby and losing SACM funding were the main reasons preventing her from continuing in the program.

Language learning needs. The four participants wanted to improve their speaking ability because it offered them opportunities to participate in class. In addition, their goal for learning English was not to get a job but rather to communicate with others. Alya revealed her goal for learning English in the IEI: "When I moved to the US, I wanted to speak English fluently and become professional in English" (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017). She added, "When I first came, I had the basics but I couldn't talk. I was not confident enough to talk" (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017). Since speaking

was important to her, Alya tried to learn speaking by practicing it with her classmates as "Practicing speaking with classmates is much better because you don't feel shy or hesitant since we usually share a similar language learning experience and level" (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017).

Although speaking was the most important skill, English programs focused more on grammar, reading, and writing. In addition, the speaking and listening classes were offered in the afternoon, which was difficult for Alya due to her obligations at home. She also mentioned that the IEI did not offer enough speaking classes for beginners:

> It will be harder to stay longer in the IEI. I wanted to take listening and speaking because I need to practice speaking, but the courses were offered in the afternoon, which was not suitable for my situation. I wish there were morning classes. (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017)

She went on to describe that it was a problem for other female Saudi students who were parents:

> Students cannot choose the course or the time that is suitable for them. For example, some students want to choose specific courses and finish at 12 p.m.; however, speaking classes in particular are usually available in the afternoon, which is not suitable for many female students and might make them drop out. (Alya, Interview 1, October 28, 2017)

This indicated that language program restrictions, such as class time, might also constrain the opportunities of dependent student with family responsibilities to invest in learning English and focus on the skills they really need. The next participant, Layla, had different ways of investing in language learning outside the classroom.

Layla: Investing in Language Learning by Resisting Student Identities

Background. Layla moved to the US with her husband and child because her husband planned to learn English and then pursue his MA and PhD at an American university. She also planned to learn the language and then apply for a BA. Layla was excited about moving to the US because she liked the idea of experiencing a new life and culture. However, after moving there, she became afraid of going out alone because of people's attitudes toward her garb. Additionally, her language ability was very weak and she could not speak or understand very well, so she was not able to communicate with people in public. Although her husband's language level was similar to her, she felt safe and comfortable going out with him because he spoke a little better than her. Layla believed it was important to learn English to pursue her BA and be able to communicate with people easily when she went out alone. She enrolled in an IEI from the first month in the US; however, she dropped out of the program after two months because she was having a baby. Then she enrolled in the IEI again after one year but dropped out again, and her goal changed; she just wanted to have enough knowledge about the language. Although she was a hardworking student in the IEI, she believed it would be very difficult to pursue a BA in English, so she decided to do it in Saudi Arabia and invest in learning English by socializing with people, such as her neighbor and people in public.

Appearance and gender socialization. Similar to Alma and Alya, it was also important for Layla to feel that the class respected her choice to wear a niqab and hijab. She revealed that her teachers understood her situation and respected her: "I like how language teachers were nice with me and understood my situation as a Muslim woman because I wear a niqab. I did not have problems with discrimination" (Layla, Interview 1,

October 20, 2017). However, outside the classroom, she was afraid of receiving negative attention from her appearance:

I was feeling uncomfortable and did not go out a lot, maybe because of my hijab or I wasn't used to the people there. I was also afraid of their attitudes toward me, but then I realized that they were friendly to deal with. I never got a strange attitude toward my appearance except once from a boy who was asking his parents about why I looked like that. (Layla, Interview 1, October 20, 2017)

Socializing and talking with people in public is one way of learning and practicing the language. Therefore, when Layla was scared about people's attitudes in public, she had fewer opportunities to practice speaking outside the classroom. However, after getting used to her new life in the US and realizing that the people were less threatening than she initially believed, she invested in learning English by going out alone to practice speaking. In addition, due to her pregnancy, she found that learning English by socializing with people was more suitable for her because she was not able to attend the language program.

Layla held similar opinions to those of Alya in terms of groupwork: "I was fine with groupwork but I don't like to work alone with only men" (Layla, Interview 1, October 20, 2017). However, she was more encouraged to attend social events because she believed they were a great opportunity for her to practice her English:

The Illinois institution arranges trips for language students. They go to famous places for a whole day, including lunch. I usually went alone with my teacher and classmates. It was a good opportunity for me to speak with the teacher and classmates because it's outside the classroom. In Illinois, every semester, there

was a social event called ladies night. Teachers gathered all the female students and offered dinner and a snack. I attended twice, and it was a great opportunity to learn about each other and welcome new students. It was also a good opportunity to exchange our culture and traditions. (Layla, Interview 1, October 20, 2017)

Layla talked about participating in social activities in the Illinois institution because they arranged a wider variety of activities than the mid-south institution. Layla found that participating in social activities helped her practice speaking with others. Although she dropped out of the program, wearing a niqab and hijab and the presence of male students were not her reasons for doing so. She knew how to invest in practicing the language without going against her beliefs. This meant that her Islamic identity and cultural beliefs toward the presence of male students and people's attitudes toward her appearance did not influence her language investment. Unlike Alma, Layla was able to participate in groupwork in class, interact with her classmates, and participate in social activities outside the classroom. I think that Layla focused on learning the language but in a different way than Alma and Alya. The reason is that she invested in learning English by socializing with Americans more than sitting in class or using websites.

Family responsibilities. Layla did well in the IEI and was able to invest in learning English. She was taking advantage of her husband and child being busy at school and spending a lot of time outside the house, as she decided to enroll in the IEI to make better use of her stay and learn English:

In the US, my husband and child spend a long time outside the house, so I wanted to spend my time on something useful. I never thought that English would help me get a better job because I didn't plan to have a job. My husband motives me to

learn because he had a difficult time when he learned English, but I wasn't

motivated from inside to pursue my BA in the US. (Layla, Interview 1, October

20, 2017)

Unlike Norton's (2000) participants, Layla was not learning English to get a good job.

She wanted to learn to benefit herself and be able to socialize with people in public

without the help of her husband. Layla compromised between her family and IEI duties:

"In my experience, the break time was enough to do my homework, study for the test, so

when I went back home, I could take care of my children and house" (Layla, Interview 1,

October 20, 2017). Her husband was also very supportive of her to learn the language in

the IEI and apply for a BA as well. Nevertheless, Layla dropped out the first time because

of her pregnancy with her second baby as she needed to take care of him. In addition,

when she dropped out the second time, she mentioned other reasons: "Children,

pregnancy, strong social relations with Saudi friends, transportation, especially in this

city because my house was far from the IEI" (Layla, Interview 1, October 20, 2017).

This indicated that her cultural beliefs influenced her language learning because

having a baby might be a reason for her to think that family responsibilities should take

priority. Therefore, although she was able to negotiate her Islamic identity, as mentioned

above, her cultural beliefs constrained her opportunity to learn English in the IEI and

made her postpone her goal of completing a BA in the US.

Language learning needs. Layla aimed to learn the language in order to be able

to communicate with people. Therefore, when she was in the IEI, Layla stated that

"Because my language was weak and classmates too, we learn by trying to speak with

each other or when we speak with someone who is weaker than us" (Layla, Interview 1,

October 20, 2017). She expressed that "I can learn English outside the classroom. I used to talk with my classmates during the break to practice speaking in English" (Layla, Interview 1, October 20, 2017). Layla also spoke with non-Saudis to force herself to practice new vocabulary:

> I usually sit with Saudi and non-Saudi students during break so we have the chance to speak in English to understand each other. Socializing with others has helped me a lot because I reinforced myself using vocabulary and making sentences to chat with others. (Layla, Interview 1, October 20, 2017)

This showed that Layla was not having problems practicing and learning the language inside the classroom due to her religious beliefs. Her goal was to be able to speak and she offered herself opportunities inside and outside the classroom to do so. She did not mention anything about the influence of the presence of male students in her co-educational classroom. She also did not mention people's attitudes in class toward her garb. Therefore, having a comfortable environment encouraged her to invest in learning English.

Moreover, socializing with Americans is important when learning English. For example, Layla was lucky to have a friendly American neighbor who was interested in learning about Muslim culture and beliefs. This older woman helped Layla practice English, learn more about American culture, and enjoy life in the US:

> I used to talk with my neighbor [in Illinois]. She was the first American to help me socialize and practice my English. I took advantage of this by speaking English and correcting my mistakes and learning more about American culture. In

addition, this woman also wanted to know more about Muslim culture because her daughter is married to a Muslim guy. (Layla, Interview 1, October 20, 2017)

On the other hand, Layla did not spend a long time enrolling in an IEI because she did not like her positioning as a student, and due to her cultural beliefs, her positioning as a mother was viewed as more important than studying. She was also able to find other ways outside the classroom to learn English, especially speaking, which was her priority. For example, Layla would chat with her American neighbor to practice the language and learn about the culture. She also participated in social activities with her teacher and classmates, such as picnics, lunches, or ladies nights, and went to public places to try to have a conversation and practice her speaking. Since Layla's husband and child were busy in the morning, resisting the student position as well as compromising between her mother role and finding ways of investing in learning English helped Layla learn the language inside and outside the IEI.

Huda: Language Learning as a Resistance to Discrimination

Background. Huda had one child when she moved to the US with her husband because he wanted to pursue his MA. Huda did not plan to learn English; however, a discrimination incident on an airplane made her decide to learn English in order to be able to understand what people were saying and how she could react. Although she got pregnant three times and had a heavy responsibility toward her family and study, she did very well in the IEI and passed with excellent grades. The reason for this was that resisting discrimination worked as a motivator for Huda to learn English. Huda was able to invest in learning English by attending class every day, doing homework, passing tests,

interacting with her classmates and teachers, and arranging a meeting with a conversation partner.

Appearance and gender socialization. The case of Huda was different from the others. Although she had maintained her Muslim identity, as reflected in her clothing, she did not mention anything about her clothing posing a challenge to her integrating with classmates or people in public. Rather, Huda considered language proficiency and security the main problems that made socializing with people in the US difficult for her:

> I: Is it the language that made it hard for you to socialize, or are there other reasons?
>
> P: It's the language and feeling secure. I mean I often hear that a girl went out with her friend and never came back. You see pictures in the mall and supermarket about kidnapped or missing people. So that makes me feel scared. Regarding my hijab, I had no problem because it is something I should do.
>
> (Huda, Interview 1, September 13, 2017)

Huda did not view her clothing as an obstacle; instead, there was a connection between practicing the language and feeling secure. She had difficulty socializing with Americans to practice English because she held a negative view of American people and culture from what she had seen in movies and the stories she had heard about kidnappings and missing persons. Huda's views thus raised two important considerations about practicing the language with others: fluency and feeling unsafe in American society. Regarding studying in mixed-gender classrooms, Huda trusted the teachers more than Alma did:

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For me it's okay to learn in a mixed environment as long as no one annoys me. Besides, teachers in the IEI know that if you wear a hijab, you prefer not to work with only men. They mix groups. (Huda, Interview 1, September 13, 2017)

It was clear that similar to Alya, Layla, and Alma, Huda expected teachers to know something about her values and preferences because of her religious identity reflected by her dress. It also made the classroom more comfortable for her if the teacher respected her preference not to work with or sit close to only male students. Therefore, wearing a hijab helped dependent female students maintain their cultural and Islamic values because it signaled these values clearly to others.

In terms of gender socialization, unlike Alma and Layla, Huda expressed that gender was not a problem. Instead, it was having Saudi students in class that made her afraid of making mistakes. She said, "When I started learning English, I felt embarrassed to talk in English in front of Saudi students, male or female" (Huda, Interview 1, September 13, 2017). Huda explained that having Saudi students in class was not a preference for two reasons. First, when her language was weak, she was afraid to make mistakes in front of them, possibly because she knew them outside the IEI and was afraid they would make fun of her. Second, she mentioned the following:

If there are female Saudi students, this might give them the chance to talk in Arabic with me, which is something I don't want to do in class. It will also make the teacher angry at both of us, and although I really don't want to speak in Arabic, she will blame us both. (Huda, Interview 12, January 17, 2018)

Therefore, Huda wanted to take advantage of the IEI by practicing English with her classmates, so having Saudi or Arab students might limit the chances for practicing

English. In addition, when I observed Huda in class, there was a male Arab student who tried to speak Arabic with her to ask about the meaning of some vocabulary in Arabic. Part of the observation notes are given in Table 6.

Table 6

Observation Notes on Huda

Date	Class/Time	Notes
11/15	Intermediate conversation 1:30-3:30	-Huda sits in the front. -She gets along with her classmates and groupwork. -I notice that the Arab student is always talking with her in Arabic, even in the groupwork. I saw her reply in Arabic to him but she was not happy. -They have groupwork about shopping by making conversation as if they are in a pharmacy or a shop. Huda is doing very well talking and chatting. Huda was excited to participate. -When the class started group exercise, the teacher joined each group and discussed with them. I saw Huda was excited and confident to talk and argue about her point. -Huda participated many times by talking with confidence to her teacher and classmates.

After class, I had a conversation with Huda as a follow-up interview:

I: Do you like to speak in Arabic with your classmate? Why?

P: No, I don't like that. But I have to sometimes because I feel shy not to answer or say that I need to speak in English only.

I: Does this happen often?

P: No. Sometimes. Not always. And usually short answers, not a long chat. I'm okay with that. (Huda, Interview 9, November 15, 2017)

Huda was different from the other three women, as she said, "It's fine with me to join groupwork with a man" (Huda, Interview 7, November 7, 2017). When I observed her in class, the teacher asked her to join a group of male students, but I think that she hesitated because I saw her moving her chair to the group table then back and was looking around waiting for the group to open a space for her. The all-male group did not

move their chairs, so she got her books and bag and moved to join a female group in the back. However, in the next lecture, she did not wait for the men to invite her. She told me, "I joined them because I didn't feel shy this time. I felt like I shouldn't wait for them to offer" (Huda, Interview 7, November 7, 2017). This incident was a demonstration of what Huda said earlier: that studying in a mixed-gender environment was not a problem for her when she enrolled in the IEI, and according to my observation, Huda was comfortable (with a little effort) in co-educational classes as she could interact with male students in class. Therefore, her attitude toward male students did not prevent her from joining groupwork and participating in class. I also noticed in the observation that Huda dealt with both male and female classmates in the same way and never mentioned gender socialization as a challenge for her in the language classroom.

Family responsibilities. Huda moved to the US with her husband and had three children. She was enrolled in an IEI at the time of the study and understood her positioning as a mother and wife who had many responsibilities while trying to embrace her dream of being able to speak fluently in English:

I believe in one thing. As long as I have the chance to learn the language. Not your mother tongue. And the government pays for everything. So it's free. I shouldn't waste that and be absent and not try to pass the courses. I'm stubborn in terms of attending classes. I believe I need the language to help my children. Everything is in English now. I learn the language because of myself. I learn to help myself and my children. Even if I wanted to travel, I'd need to speak English. I don't want to look like a moron. I want to understand what people are

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saying. It's not about getting a job. I also never thought about or planned to

pursue my MA. No. No. (Huda, Interview 1, September 13, 2017)

Huda wanted to learn English to socialize and communicate with people who did

not speak Arabic and educated herself to teach her children English. However, I believe

that the discrimination incident that happened to her on a plane and the influence of her

Islamic and cultural identity were the strongest reasons for her to learn English.

Therefore, Huda resisted this discrimination against her and became motivated to learn.

According to the quotes above, attitudes toward her Islamic garb and socializing with

male students did not constrain Huda from learning English. The reason for this was that

Huda believed that people should accept her as a Muslim woman and accept her

appearance. Thus, instead of being scared, shy, and hating American people and culture,

she was more curious to learn their language and understand everything around her. Huda

was an example of how discrimination can work as a motivator for a dependent female

Saudi student. Huda knew how to invest in learning English by being a responsible

student, taking advantage of the scholarship, attending classes every day, doing well on

exams, and studying and working hard to improve her language skills.

Huda's experience was unique because she held more responsibilities than the

other three women in this study. She also dropped out twice because of two difficult

pregnancies. But after giving birth to her third baby, she enrolled in the IEI and was a

hardworking student:

As a mother and wife, I'm facing a hard time doing my homework and studying

for the exam. I have to finish everything before they come home from daycare,

but at the same time I have to prepare their lunch. So after they go to sleep at

8:00, I start studying, but then I become very tired, so sometimes I do my

homework in the morning. (Huda, Interview 4, September 27, 2017)

She also mentioned that "I never read books or watch TV to find vocabulary for the class

presentation because I hardly find time for myself to rest. When the children sleep, I just

want to lie down and close my eyes to rest" (Huda, Interview 9, November 15, 2017).

Huda told me that she needed to improve her speaking skills but could not enroll in

speaking classes in the IEI:

I'll see about the next session. If they're in the afternoon, maybe the schedule

won't be suitable because of my children and the transportation. It's hard for my

husband to pick up the children and drop me off for afternoon classes. It'll be

hard. Besides, he's busy since this is the last year of his MA. (Huda, Interview 5,

October 4, 2017)

Huda's inability to drive placed the responsibility of transportation solely on her husband,

and she prioritized his degree. Therefore, this limited the chances for her to choose the

classes she needed because they were offered in the afternoon.

Huda also reported having a difficult time with her children: "Doing homework

late at night is hard. I have three children and my husband is busy studying. I also need to

memorize new words, write paragraphs, and do grammar homework that require

concentration and time" (Huda, Interview 3, September 22, 2017). However, when I

observed her, she was never absent, and she did well on her tests, interacted with the

teacher, and sat in front to be more engaged with the teacher, as she explained:

I sit in the front because of my sight and with my pregnancy I need to concentrate

more. Besides, I want to be more involved and I can get the teacher's attention. I

used to come early to sit in the front before the students came. (Huda, Interview

12, January 17, 2018)

Huda also joined groupwork, discussed her ideas with classmates, and performed her presentation in front of the class with confidence. She believed that social events offered good opportunities to practice the language, although she did note that it was hard for her to socialize with her classmates more because of her children: "I can't attend social events held by the IEI every Friday because of my children" (Huda, Interview 1, September 13, 2017).

I think that because Huda faced challenges at home, including her children, her husband's responsibilities, doing homework, and studying for exams late at night, she tried to make up for these challenges in class. Although she had three children and felt sick because she was pregnant, she was always happy to learn new things every day. She passed her previous courses with good grades and was afraid that she would not be able to pass with an A the semester she was observed. She told me, "I used to get an A in all my courses, but this semester seems very difficult to catch up with. I'll be happy even if I pass with a C or D" (Huda, Interview 4, September 27, 2017). She also explained her reasoning:

My brain is busy. Children and house. Something changed. Do I need to say it? I'm pregnant now. It's not the right time. I planned to study and travel because this is the last year for my husband. I'm not happy about my grades. I can't concentrate. This pregnancy is different. I can't focus on anything. I feel sick and sleepy all the time. (Huda, Interview 1, September 13, 2017)

Being a mother and wife while studying was not easy for any of the participants. Family responsibilities affected their learning process in many ways, including participating in weekly social events, studying well for the exam, attending class every morning, doing all the homework, and learning English from other resources and materials, such as reading a book or watching TV programs in English. According to Duff (2012), agency refers to "people's ability to make choices, take control, self regulate and thereby pursue their goals" (p. 417). Although Huda had more children than the other three participants, encountered difficulties from family responsibilities, and had less support from her husband than the others, she was able to invest in learning English in class more than the others. Huda did not show resistance to the language learning process because she decided to learn English for an important reason—to resist discrimination and Islamophobia, as discussed in detail below. She also wanted to be able understand and speak fluently with non-Arabic speakers. Finally, Huda believed that coming to the US was a great opportunity that she should take advantage of to learn the language and culture directly.

Language learning needs. Huda's English was weak when she first arrived: "My language was not so good. Only grammar. I couldn't speak. I wasn't confident. I felt that if I said something, it would be wrong. I had never practiced speaking before" (Huda, Interview 1, September 13, 2017). Her ultimate goal was being able to understand people and be able to reply to them:

Speaking is the most important skill, because it is the only thing that benefits me. I don't want to learn English to get a job. I want to learn for myself. To help

myself, to socialize and communicate with people. (Huda, Interview 1, September 13, 2017)

In the first session, Huda took only reading, writing, and grammar, but she believed that she needed speaking in the second session; however, referring to the speaking classes, she said, "If they're in the afternoon, maybe the schedule won't be suitable because […] It's hard for my husband to pick up the children and drop me off for afternoon classes" (Huda, Interview 5, October 4, 2017). She made the following suggestion:

Although reading and writing are important, they're not like speaking. I wish I could practice speaking more. I would prefer if the IEI met with each student and found out what her needs were so she could choose the courses that she really wanted. (Huda, Interview 12, January 17, 2018)

Since Huda needed to practice speaking, the IEI offered a conversation partner, but it was not easy to arrange an appointment with her, and when I asked her if she could learn English outside the classroom, she said the following:

Yes, if I find someone to talk to. But I couldn't find anyone here. I tried to arrange a time to meet with a conversation partner, but I only did that once. I couldn't do it after that. We met outside, but after that she didn't have the chance to meet again. (Huda, Interview 12, January 17, 2018)

However, Alya, Layla, and Huda all found a way to invest in practicing speaking. Huda believed that having classmates from different nationalities offered her opportunities to practice speaking English:

I like having classmates from different nationalities because no one speaks

Arabic. There is one Jordanian student, but I don't talk with him, even if we're in

the same group. I also like that I don't have female Arab students because even if

I don't talk to them, they will talk to me in Arabic. (Huda, Interview 1, September

13, 2017)

Huda's goal was to be able to speak fluently in order to help herself and children.

Although she had a big family and a busy husband, she was open to look for ways to

learn and practice the language. The discrimination incident, getting pregnant three times,

and having transportation problems did not stop her from being a hardworking student

and investing in learning English to make use of her stay in the US. In the next section, I

explain a new kind of resistance that worked as a motivator for Huda to learn English in

the US.

Resistance to Islamophobia and discrimination. Huda displayed a completely

different kind of resistance from the other three participants. In Huda's case, resistance to

external discrimination and Islamophobia provided a motivation for her to learn English

and proved to be a true investment in her education at the IEI. Huda expressed her initial

fears about moving to the US: "My idea before I came was not good. I used to have

nightmares that the police would arrest us. I swear. However, my life is much better in

the US when I came" (Huda, Interview 1, September 13, 2017). Huda's original fears,

however, were borne out of a harrowing episode that happened on an airplane where she

was discriminated against:

There was something that bothered me the first time I came to the US. I was

flying from New York to Orlando with my boy and we were about to land. My

boy was crying so much. I was trying to calm him down. Then, an American

woman kept shouting and shouting and shouting at me. I understood what she was

saying, but I didn't know how to respond. I wasn't shocked because before I

came, I had an idea that the US was a scary country, police everywhere, I should

always be careful. There's crime, just like in the movies. And that woman kept

telling me I wasn't a good mother and that I didn't know how to deal with my

children. I was just crying and crying because I didn't know what to say to her.

Then, another woman, when she saw me crying, tried to calm me down and talk

nicely. She said, "Americans aren't like that." (Huda, Interview 1, September 13,

2017)

In these quotations, Huda described the US as a "scary" place and in the episode on the

plane portrayed herself as helpless because she "didn't know what to say." These

experiences and reactions played an important role in Huda's investment in her own

English language education. In the following quotation, she explained how humiliation

could be a motivator to learn, demonstrating how learning English as an act of resistance

could be useful for other women:

I think when she [a future dependent Saudi student] comes here and finds herself

unable to talk or understand, she will know how important it is to learn English.

In addition, if she wants to take advantage of learning English, this is the best

chance and the right time to learn. If she doesn't really want to, I want to say let

her go outside and need help and no one can help her. I went through a bad

situation when I first arrived on the plane. And that was my motivation. I

understood the humiliation, but I couldn't say a word. It's important to learn

because if someone insulted me, I could say something back, and if someone was

being nice to me, I would know how to thank them too. (Huda, Interview 12,

January 17, 2018)

Huda believed that coming to the US was the perfect opportunity for her and for any

dependent Saudi women to learn English because the government funded all the

expenses. Therefore, as Huda mentioned in a previous quote, a dependent student should

be more punctual and committed to learning the language in language initiations. She

also thought that learning English in the US should be a motivation for dependent

students because the learners would be surrounded by Americans, which would force

them to hear English everywhere and to understand and speak it:

I think what could motivate a dependent female student is that she will be living

in a new society. She won't be able to do anything. She won't be able to

understand them and they won't be able to understand her unless she learns their

language. Second, if she has children, she should learn to help her children study.

Third, it's a great opportunity she should take to learn and be more educated.

(Huda, Interview 12, January 17, 2018)

According to Huda's experiences, resistance can work as a motivator instead of

influencing the learning process and can result in learners shaping the learning context to

meet their needs, as Huda seemed to do by coming to class early, engaging with the

teacher, and her other behavior (cf. Fogle, 2012). When Huda came to the US, she did not

plan to pursue a degree, but she was thinking of learning English if her situation allowed.

However, what happened to her on the plane made her see the importance of learning

English to be able to engage with Americans and American culture. Therefore,

experiencing discrimination made her resist it and helped her decide to be more powerful

by investing in learning English. Among the four participants, Huda's life was the hardest

because she had more children, was pregnant, the IEI was far from her house, she did not

drive, and her husband was less supportive than the others. However, she was the most

punctual, committed student. In addition, she spoke the least during the interviews about

the influence of her religious beliefs, such as wearing a hijab or gender relations. Table 7

presents another part of her observation notes.

Table 7

Observation Notes on Huda

Date	Class/Time	Notes
9/22	Reading/Writing 9:00-10:50	-She sits in the front. -The class starts with groupwork to discuss their paragraphs. -She is speaking English and discussing her comments clearly with her group. -She is trying to explain her points to the group by giving examples to clarify her point. Huda is very engaged with her group, discussing her points. Although the students' group makes rounds and changes, she is doing well talking and commenting on their paragraphs.

Huda invested in learning English by attending class regularly, sitting in front to

be more engaged, putting her children in daycare for longer to give herself time to study

and do her homework, and communicating well in class activities to practice speaking

and improve her language. Finally, when she decided to come to the US, her fear was

about safety, but the discrimination she experienced caused her to seek to be a more

powerful, committed language learner.

Importance of Religious Identity in Investment in Language Learning

The role of religion in the model of investment is very important for dependent

Saudi female students because of many reasons. In particular, negative attitudes toward

their Islamic garb and the presence of male students in class can cause students to be

isolated in class, avoid participation in groupwork, and feel less like they belong in the learning context. It can also constrain the opportunities for such students to participate in social events arranged by the language institution. These are all subtle forms of resistance to the practices of the English language classroom and the activities and curricula offered by the IEI.

On the other hand, when the dependent students in this study felt their religious beliefs were respected by the teacher and classmates, they felt more comfortable and encouraged to learn and practice the language. This indicated that religious identity (instantiated in this study in women's dress, comfort with mixed-gender classes, and reactions to Islamophobia) influenced the language learning investment for dependent students who were strongly tied to their religious identity (cf. Darvin & Norton, 2015).

The experiences of the four women showed that they shared the same challenge of their religious values being important to them when learning English, while at the same time conflict with these values could cause them to resist the learning process. For example, Alya and Layla found that the IEI context felt safer and more encouraging. It also offered them opportunities to invest in learning English, such as participating in groupwork, doing homework, and learning new vocabulary. On the other hand, Alma felt that the classroom was supposed to be safer but found that it was not. As a result, the classroom constrained opportunities for her to learn and made her resist learning English in class.

It is important to mention that those wearing a niqab (e.g., Alma, Layla, and Alya) could experience more negative attitudes from people who do not understand their religious values. Therefore, Islamic garb influenced the language learning process in two

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ways. First, it limited the students' interaction with English speakers outside the classroom because some dependent students invested in learning English by socializing with people in public. Second, it affected how they felt their classmates perceived them.

Family Responsibility and Language Learning Investment

The role of mother influenced students' investment in learning English. For example, Alma suffered from the feeling of being responsible for her daughter's unhappiness and could not go in the morning to class because of that. However, her husband was very supportive of her, and she was able to compromise between her studies and house duties. On the other hand, Huda had more children and her husband was less supportive of her. Nevertheless, she was highly motivated to learn, so she attended class and did well on her exams. The reason for this was that Huda was more empowered and determined to achieve her learning goal of countering discrimination than Alma. Layla did not like her positioning as a student and felt that her family came first, two reasons that made her less invested in class and drop out of the language program.

Comparing the Language Learning Experiences of the Participants

Although the four participants shared some similarities, such as their Islamic values and experiencing co-educational classes for the first time, they differed in how they invested in learning English and how their Islamic and cultural identity contributed to their dropping out of the program. The four participants maintained their Islamic identities, which was obvious in how they dressed and their attitudes about socializing with male students. However, this identity caused some challenges. Alya did well in class because, although she was sensitive about negative attitudes toward her Islamic garb, she was able to negotiate her identity by performing activities that helped her learn English,

such as giving a presentation, joining groupwork, and using English websites. At the same time, she refused to participate in social activities because she felt uncomfortable learning English outside the classroom context for fear of negative attitudes from people who might not respect her appearance. Therefore, the aspects of her religious identity were not considered a reason for Alya to resist learning the language and drop out of the program.

Huda did well in the language classroom because she negotiated her Islamic identity by learning in co-educational classes as long as her values were respected by others. However, she was different from Alya because Huda never thought that her Islamic garb or the presence of male classmates should constrain her learning opportunities. Huda also believed that people should accept her as a Muslim woman and that she had to learn English in order to have more power against discrimination. Similarly, although Layla dropped out of class, the aspects of her religious identity were not the reason. Layla was able to participate in groupwork in class, interact with her classmates, and participate in social activities outside the classroom. Although she resisted her positioning as an ESL student and being a mother was a greater priority for her than learning English, she also invested in learning English by socializing with others outside the classroom more to practice speaking and learn the language.

In contrast, the aspects of Alma's religious identity influenced her language learning process and caused her to drop out of the language program before this study was finished. Alma's classmates did not accept her garb, and the presence of male students made her remain silent and not interested in class and group activities. Therefore, when I observed her in class, I noticed that she was sitting alone in the back,

was absent a lot, skipped exams, was not able to catch up with new homework and vocabulary, and never participated with the teacher in class. When Alma enrolled in the IEI, she decided to become a professional in English and pursue her MA. She said, "I really want to learn the language so badly" (Alma, Interview 1, September 10, 2017). Therefore, I think that her resistance was not intentional, because she was prepared to learn, but the feeling of not belonging in class and being uncomfortable with the context caused her to be less active in class. In addition, when she was in the foundation level, she said she was doing well because the classroom had more women than men and she had female Saudi students who helped her when she needed an explanation about something. However, when I observed her, Alma was not encouraged to come to class, and after the first session finished, she dropped out. Therefore, I think Alma's attendance and negative attitudes in class could be interpreted as resistance practices because the classroom context was not a comfortable place for her to learn.

Alya, Huda, and Layla found that the cultural differences between students in class offered more and better opportunities to learn English and practice speaking. Their reasoning was that students from different nationalities did not share the same language, so they would be forced to speak English and explain everything to each other to understand better. However, Alma had a different position as her Japanese classmates' attitudes made her uncomfortable communicating or working with them. They constrained her opportunities to speak and made it more likely she would become disengaged from class activities, sit alone in the back, and remain silent during group activities.

I also found that these women expected teachers to know something about their values and preferences because of their dress. It also made the classroom more comfortable for them if the teacher respected their preference not to work with or sit close to only male students. Therefore, wearing a hijab helped them maintain their cultural and Islamic values because it signaled these values clearly to others. In terms of resistance and language learning, the hijab could offer a chance for the students to feel comfortable in the IEI and learn English if the teacher and classmates understood the importance of this practice. However, the hijab could not solve all problems for these students as the co-educational environment could prevent them from communicating and result in resistance practices in class activities with the teacher and classmates. In the next section, I discuss how Alya, Layla, and Huda were able to invest in learning English inside and outside the classroom.

Language Learning Investment

As mentioned earlier, Alya, Huda, and Layla successfully negotiated their Islamic identity and used different resources to invest in learning English outside the classroom. They actively looked for ways to improve their language skills that would be more comfortable and convenient for their needs. For example, since Alya was more sensitive about people's attitudes toward what she wore, she practiced speaking English with her husband at home, used English vocabulary to make the grocery list, watched movies and TV shows with her husband, and created vocabulary lists that she memorized with him. Alya found these strategies more comfortable for her situation as a Muslim woman. She also used a website that offered tests and quizzes to improve her language skills while maintaining her Islamic values.

Huda was always looking to meet a conversation partner at a coffee shop, used phone applications that offered speaking lessons with a native teacher, and used applications to chat with her female classmates, exchange pictures, and share special moments. Because Huda was a busy mother, she found these learning strategies more practical for her situation.

Layla would chat with her American neighbor to practice the language and learn about the culture. She also participated in social activities with her teacher and classmates, such as picnics, lunches, or ladies nights, and went to public places to try to have a conversation and practice her speaking. These ways of investing in learning English helped Layla because her husband and child were busy during the day, so she made use of her time in the morning. In addition, participants found speaking with others to be an important way to learn English because learning is not limited to books.

Conclusion

The four participants in this study faced many challenges, including the influence of their Islamic identity on learning and socializing, their family responsibilities, and challenges that prevented them from practicing speaking, which they considered the most important skill.

These factors resulted in two types of resistance that shaped different learning processes for each student. One type was resistance as disengagement in the classroom, which led one student to be regularly absent, fail exams, sit alone, and be uninterested in class interactions and activities. The second was resistance to discrimination and Islamophobia when experiencing a new culture. This resistance resulted in a highly motivated language learner determined to learn English to be more aware of how to

respond to negative and positive attitudes of people in the target culture. Finally, the study showed that when a learner maintained a strong Islamic identity and tried to cope with a more open and Western environment (as in Alya's situation), this resulted in the student sticking to her religious values and avoiding any activities that might conflict with those values. Instead, she worked toward her goals and invested in her language learning in ways that were more comfortable and convenient for her.

This study showed two types of resistance unique to Saudi dependent students in the US. Saudi women on dependent visas are in a unique position because the government offers them a chance to learn English in one year or stay home; therefore, if they do well in learning English, it means they know how to invest in learning English in the period of one year. In addition, the aspects of their religious identity, appearance, family responsibilities, and other social constraints are major challenges that might prevent them from learning English. Furthermore, these women experienced discrimination and difficulties in studies and came up with creative ways to deal with them. Finally, although they were strongly tied to their Islamic values and practices, they found ways to learn English outside the classroom that could help them maintain their Islamic identity and values while improving their language skills.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Study Significance

This study used the dual lens of identity and agency to understand students'

engagement and investment in an intensive ESL program in the US. It drew attention to

the relationship between learner identity, agency, and language learning and investigated

the relationship between language and identity construction and how the four women as

mothers and wives invested themselves in learning English. Furthermore, it explored the

type of resistance that resulted from being a language learner in an American classroom.

Finally, it looked at the role of social and institutional factors, such as family members,

friends, teachers, and activities, which facilitate or constrain learning opportunities.

The findings revealed that aspects of religious and cultural identity influenced the

Saudi dependent female students' investment in learning English. In addition,

experiencing a co-educational class for the first time increased the feeling of anxiety

toward participating and interacting in class for some students. Negative attitudes toward

their Islamic garb could influence the students' language learning investment in class. As

a result, the students might show two types of resistance. The first was disengagement

from classroom activities, when students had less interest in class attendance, were less

engaged in class activities, skipped exams, and failed courses. The second was resistance

against Islamophobia and discrimination, which worked as a motivator that encouraged

one student to be more determined to learn English in order to resist discrimination and

become a successful language learner.

Furthermore, as dependent students, participants were expected to meet greater family responsibilities that could work as a constraint on their language learning investment. Thus, some might resist their position as students and fail to learn English in class because they could not compromise between their roles as wives/mothers and students to learn English, while others found other ways to invest in learning English outside the classroom by socializing with Americans around them, such as neighbors or friends. The study also found that students who were able to negotiate their Islamic and cultural identity found ways to invest in learning English that did not contradict their beliefs and values, for example, wearing more colorful clothing, avoiding sitting next to male students in class, using website activities to practice English rather than attending social events with men, reading books, and watching TV shows or movies.

Before this empirical study, no known research had focused on the identity construction, resistance, and language learning investment of female dependent Saudi students accompanying their husbands to the US and enrolling in an ESL program. The situation of these students was unique compared to other female students and mothers enrolled in English programs in the US because their strong ties to their Islamic identity resulted in challenges to their learning and practicing the language inside and outside the IEI. This study also investigated how participants' visa status reduced their learning opportunities or forced them to compromise between class and family responsibilities to learn English. This study expanded upon research in TESOL and applied linguistics by drawing attention to the importance of social and religious factors to the learning process and expectations of female Saudi students in the US.

The study also aimed to help dependent students look for ways of investing in learning English rather than looking for motivations to become better language learners. The findings could be used to help English institutions and tutors at American universities better understand dependent students' unique context by describing their situation, needs, and obstacles and by offering suggestions for teaching times, materials, and social and academic activities that could help them learn English. Finally, the study could help the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education by suggesting courses to motivate dependent students to learn the L2 and engage in the host culture.

Identity and language learning. The four women in this study did not talk about developing or constructing a new identity during their learning experience. It was obvious from the interviews that their Islamic identity was strong because it reflected on their thinking and practices in the classroom. Wenger (2000) maintained that "A strong identity involves deep connections with others through shared histories and experiences, reciprocity, affection and mutual commitments" (p. 239). As mentioned in the results chapter, aspects of their Islamic identity affected the learning process in two ways: by affecting their classmates' attitudes toward their attire (hijab and niqab) and by influencing participants' attitudes toward socializing with male students in class. Both factors had an impact on participants' stated desires to participate in class activities and their ability to find a voice in class.

Participants' clothing and mixed-gender classes were important, but some participants were better able to negotiate their Islamic identity to learn the language, while one was not able to do this. Alma had a difficult time engaging in class activities because of her classmates' attitude toward her appearance and because the presence of

male students made her embarrassed to talk in class. Alma was a good example of how aspects of their religious beliefs and identities can influence female Saudi students to be disengaged from class activities and resist language learning in class. Resisting language learning in class caused Alma to become absent, avoid class participation and interactions with teachers and classmates, and ultimately fail her language courses. Alya was likewise strongly tied to her Islamic beliefs and was not able to participate in social events to practice English because of the presence of men. She also had some difficulty joining groups of male students in class when the teacher asked her to do so. However, she was able to negotiate her beliefs by changing the color of her Islamic garb so that other people would be more likely to accept her. She participated in groupwork but avoided sitting next to a male student. Therefore, she was not resisting the learning process but rather looking for ways of interacting and learning that would not contradict her beliefs. Layla's behavior was also tied to her Islamic identity, but she was able to invest in learning the language. She communicated with her classmates and teachers in the IEI and participated in social events off campus to improve her language skills. Huda likewise did not refer to her Islamic beliefs as a constraint on her learning in class; she believed that if she felt secure, she would be able to learn and communicate with people in English.

The results indicated that having strong ties to a religious identity could influence students' language learning process because religious beliefs might contradict the class environment, as was the case in this study where participants experienced co-educational classes for the first time.

Resistance agency and language learning. Resistance is a type of agency (Ahearn, 2001) that is often framed as refusing to learn or participate in learning

communities and is considered an impediment to language learning (McKay & Wong, 1996; Miller, 2011; Morita, 2004; Talmy, 2008). The present study found that aspects of religious identity, family responsibilities, and discrimination influenced the learning process of the four participants and resulted in two types of resistance. The first was to resist learning by disengaging from class practices. Norton (2012) maintained that "It has been argued that the extent to which a learner speaks or is silent, or writes, reads, or resists, has much to do with the extent to which the learner is valued in any given institution or community" (p. 1). For example, Alma felt uncomfortable in class because she received less appreciation from her classmates as a result of their attitude toward her attire, which made her less engaged in groupwork and class activities. ESL classrooms are a rich environment for such resistance because they can create conflict between the language and cultural ideologies (Miller, 2011). Therefore, the experience of co-educational classrooms created some obstacles for female Saudi students because the presence of men might make their interaction and participation with classmates more difficult, as in Alma's situation. In addition, sitting alone in class, playing with their phone, skipping exams, and being absent are signs of resisting the learning process and being disengaged from classroom practices (Escandon, 2004; McVeigh 1997, 2002; Talmy, 2008).

The results also found that students' participation was influenced by the classroom's social, cultural, historical, curricular, pedagogical, and interpersonal context (see Morita, 2004). Therefore, participating in group activities, giving a PowerPoint presentation in front of male and female students, and attending social events was difficult for some participants because these women were strongly tied to their Islamic

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beliefs, which limited relationships with male students. Morita (2004) believed that silence did not reflect less interest in class participation but rather could be a way of engaging in cognitive, effective, and social activities in class. Duff (2002) also maintain that some students resisted their subordinate position verbally while others preferred to be silent as a way to invest their ability and engage in written class activities. However, silence does not necessarily mean language learners are motivated, as they could simply not be invested in classroom practices (Norton & Toohey, 2011), as shown in Alma's situation. Moreover, learners' identity and agency can strongly influence how they invest in learning English in the target community (Siegel, 1994; Zuengler, 1989). Therefore, Alma showed resistance practices despite being motivated from her husband and family, because she did not know how to invest in learning English, as Norton (2012) described:

> a learner can be a highly motivated language learner but may nevertheless have little investment in the language practices of a given classroom or community, which may, for example, be racist, sexist, elitist, or homophobic. Thus, despite being highly motivated, a learner could be excluded from the language practices of a classroom, and in time positioned as a "poor" or unmotivated language learner. (p. 6)

For example, family responsibilities limited the learning opportunities of participants in the present study. Alma was having a difficult time taking care of her daughter because she was sick while also going to the IEI. She could not study for her exams or do homework for the same reason. Therefore, family life worked as a constraint, causing her to resist the learning process although she was receiving strong encouragement from her father and husband. The construct of investment is important in this study because it

"offers a way to understand learners' variable desires to engage in social interaction and community practices" (Norton, 2012, p. 6). By comparing Alma as a less invested language learner, I found that Layla, Alya, and Huda were more invested in learning English.

Layla, Alya, and Huda believed that coming to the US was a great opportunity for them to learn the language. Furthermore, they believed that their husbands and children being busy at school for much of the day was a chance to invest their time in enrolling in an IEI. For example, Layla would study and do homework during breaks so that when she came back home, she would have enough time for her family. Huda put her children to bed early, so she could have time to study. Alya would finish earlier than her husband to prepare lunch and study at night. In addition, Layla would go to the mall alone when her husband was busy at school, so she could speak with people and practice English. She also liked speaking with her neighbor as a way to learn more informal English and learn about American culture. Alya used a website assigned by her teacher to practice English, and Huda arranged time with a conversation partner to practice speaking. Because they understood the importance of English and knew how to invest in learning the language, they improved their language skills inside and outside the classroom. These three participants thus negotiated the constraints of the IEI program by finding alternate routes to English language learning.

Resistance agency can also work as a motivator and facilitate language learning (Fogle, 2012). This was exemplified by the second type of resistance found in the present study: resistance against discrimination. It is important to understand that agency is never an individual property but rather a constructed, negotiated relationship between the

individual and society (Fogle, 2012; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). Resistance agency was constructed after Huda moved to the US and was discriminated against. This experience made her understand the importance of learning English to be more engaged in American society and understand their language and practices. Although Huda faced many challenges, such as responsibilities to her children and husband, pregnancy, and transportation problems, it was surprising how discrimination could encourage her to invest in learning the language. This type of resistance is important for female Saudi students because they are often subjected to discrimination because of their Islamic attire. Finally, support from their husbands eased the learning process for all four participants by helping them study for exams, explaining new vocabulary, revising their written assignments, practicing speaking English, giving them books to read, and watching English TV shows or movies with them to help them improve.

Focusing on dependent female Saudi students was important because no previous studies had discussed their educational and social challenges as mothers and wives or how their Islamic identity represented in their attire and attitudes toward socializing with men in co-educational classrooms influenced their language learning process and adjustment to the US. Therefore, this study shed light on how such students constructed and negotiated their Islamic identity to cope with the new environment and how their agency limited or afforded opportunities for them to invest in learning English and socializing with Americans.

It is worth mentioning that the four women expected IEI teachers to understand their religious values. Therefore, they felt discouraged from participating in some class practices that contradicted those values, and they expected teachers to anticipate and

mitigate these discomforts. However, the study also draws attention to the issue of IEI staff not necessarily being familiar with Saudi students' beliefs, values, and customs, which encouraged participants to be more understanding about the new situation and feel more comfortable in class. Finally, an American classroom could allow students to experience cultural differences among students in class. Therefore, female Saudi students should consider the possibility that classmates do not understand the cultural importance of being covered or not being close to a male student or working alone with him as a Muslim woman. Such students should find better ways to introduce their values to classmates and teachers and be more open to accepting other students' differences.

Implications for Practice

The participants' interview sessions revealed problems they faced in the IEI, including with the curriculum and teachers. First, the IEI curriculum usually focused solely on grammar, reading, and writing skills in the first levels. Although students need a strong foundation in grammar, reading, and writing, participants all said that speaking was the most important skill they were looking to improve, in addition to writing and grammar. However, the speaking classes were not offered for the first two levels. Another problem was that speaking classes were usually only offered in the afternoon, which was not suitable for their situation as they needed to take care of their children. Since their husbands' graduate courses were in the afternoon and evening, it made it hard for female students to come to class.

The four students also had limited opportunities to practice speaking with a conversation partner because their partners were unavailable most of the time, making it hard to arrange an appointment with them. The students believed that it was important to

socialize with teachers and classmates outside the IEI to force themselves to speak English and learn more about other peoples' cultures, such as by participating in social activities. However, sometimes it was difficult to attend such activities because they were off campus. Therefore, Alya suggested that it would be more convenient to have social activities on campus, such as going to a café, restaurant, or library during the day, so she could participate more easily.

Participants revealed that in English classes, such as reading and writing, the teacher was usually the center of the class and did all the talking, with class discussion deemphasized or nonexistent. The students mentioned that some grammar classes were boring because some teachers only read from the book and assigned homework and never found ways to make it more fun to learn. They also said that all courses gave a lot of homework, which was not always useful because the participants just wanted to finish it, and Alma suggested that the teacher replace it with other activities, such as apps or websites. This kind of self-study was particularly effective for Alma, who was not as eager to interact with other students.

The participants suggested it would be better if the IEI arranged a meeting with students to ask them what skills they needed to improve and focus on, so the students could choose only the courses they needed rather than making the schedule the same for everyone. Alya mentioned that in some language institutions, the course level usually lasted for two and a half months, which is a long time for one level and would not allow the student to finish all courses in the program. Students would need to drop out because SACM would not pay for more than a year of courses. Finally, Alya mentioned that the language classrooms should all be in one building rather than in different buildings that

were sometimes far away from each other and took time to move from one building to another.

Future Directions

As mentioned earlier, this study was important because it looked more closely at the Islamic identity of four dependent Saudi female students and how this identity influenced their language learning in an IEI. It also looked at other social and institutional challenges students faced as mothers and wives trying to adjust to the new culture, learn the language, and take care of their family. Moreover, it explored the religious, social, and institutional factors affecting their opportunities to learn English and examined how their agency played a role in how they invested in learning English.

The participants in this study consisted of four students, two of which were enrolled in an IEI and two who had dropped out of the program. The data were collected by interview sessions and class observations. Future studies could examine the experiences of dependent students who were able to enroll in a program for a BA, MA, or PhD and compare the results with students who had dropped out or were still enrolled in an IEI. This comparison could reveal how students find different ways to invest in learning English. In addition, the experience of degree-seeking dependent students might show whether they construct other linguistic or social identities to learn English and socialize in the US. It could also show whether different academic fields, teachers, and classmates offer more opportunities for dependent students to be more open to accepting cultural differences and cope with negative attitudes toward their religious beliefs and values in class. Finally, exploring the agency and identity of degree-seeking dependent students would be important because the number of female Saudi students enrolling in

university programs is larger than those only studying English in an IEI. Another direction of this study could be comparing the experience of female dependent students with male dependent students in order to look at their aspects of religious identity in class and how these aspects influence their language learning and resistance.

The main limitation of this study was that participants were limited to four female students. Therefore, the results could not be generalized to all female Saudi students. Additionally, this study focused only on women and did not explore the problems of male students, which is also important to more fully understand the challenges of dependent Saudi students in the US.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Group 1

1. What is your age? What is your country of origin? What languages do you speak?

2. What is your major?

3. How long have you lived in the United States? Could you tell me about how you came to Memphis (or your current location)?

4. Could you tell me why you moved to the US?

5. Could you tell me a little bit about your living situation? Do you work?

6. What was your hope for your life in the US? What did you imagine it would be like or what did you want when you moved?

7. Could you talk about your integration into US society? What have been the major challenges? What has been easy?

8. What was the transition like for your partner?

9. How many children do you have and what are their ages?

10. What was the transition like for your children (if you have any)?

11. Did you need to learn English as a second language when you arrived? What has that experience been like?

12. Why did you decide to take courses at the university intensive English institute? Did your partner support this decision?

13. How many courses did you take? How long have you been studying English since you arrived in the US?

14. What did you like about English classes in the US?

15. What did you not like?

16. Why did you drop the courses (was it because of family, economic, social, educational problems)? Please explain.

17. Do you think you can learn English outside the classroom? How?

18. Do you think socializing with your classmates and teachers helped you learn English? How?

19. Have you experienced a social event that has encouraged you to use English? How many times?

20. Does the institution encourage social interactions along with coursework? Which one has helped the most?

21. How important is it to have female Saudi classmates?

22. What is your attitude toward the American classroom in terms of a co-ed environment, the teacher's role, groupwork, homework duties, class participation, and social interactions?

23. Do you think it is easier to learn English in the US or in Saudi Arabia? Why?

24. Are your children bilingual? What has it been like raising bilingual children?

25. Do your partner and children (if you have any) help you learn English?

26. What language or languages do you speak at home? Do you have rules about language at home?

27. What language or languages do you use outside the home? Where and when do you use English?

28. Where do you usually practice speaking English?

29. Do your children or other family members have opinions about the way you speak or use language?

30. Do you think that other people (e.g., in public) have opinions about the way you

   speak?

31. What would you suggest to help motivate female dependent students to learn?

32. What advice would you give your younger self before you left home?

33. Is there anything you would like to add? Anything I missed?

Appendix B

Email to English Institution Director

Dear………,

I am looking for a student enrolled at your institution who can participate in a research study at the University of Memphis regarding language learning resistance. This study requires the student to be interviewed about their integration into the classroom, culture, and language learning and use. It also requires class observation of the student in IEI classes by the investigator (myself). The goal of this pilot study is to better understand the lives and educational trajectories of women who come as dependents with SACM-funded students to the US. This study also explores how investment affects female Saudi students in order to become successful language learners, as well as the role of learner agency that can contribute in making the social integration in the new community easier for the language learner. Finally, the study further considers how identity is fixed or fluid during the participants' stay and study in the US with a focus on demonstrating how the social, economic, and religious factors in the Western world affect the female students' identity. If you agree to have me contact this student regarding participation in the study, please return the attached letter indicating your support at your earliest convenience.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Nada Alshabibi
Ph.D. Student, Applied Linguistics at University of Memphis

Appendix C

Email to Participants' Instructors

Dear Ms./Mr. ……,

[Name of the student] is participating in a study at the University of Memphis about female Saudi students and language learning resistance. I am writing to ask you to allow me to observe this student in your class. I will come to your class and observe the student for the whole course. I am attaching a detailed consent form for you to review. If you agree to allow me to observe your student in this study, please email me so that we can meet to arrange an observation schedule. Please let me know if you have any questions. Thanks!

Sincerely,

Nada Alshabibi
Ph.D. Student in Applied Linguistics
University of Memphis

Appendix D

Email to the President of the Saudi Club

Dear Mr. ….,

      I am a PhD student in Applied linguistics, U of M. I am conducting a study about the challenges that female Saudi students encounter during the process of learning English and adjusting to American culture. I am looking for female Saudi participants who hold an F2 visa. They should have studied English language for at least six months in an English language institution. I will be collecting the data by interviewing the participants. Please spread my email to female Saudi members asking them to contact me if they are interested in participating in my study. Thanks.

      Sincerely,

Nada Alshabibi
Ph.D. Student in Applied Linguistics
University of Memphis

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Group 2

First Interview

1. What is your age? What is your country of origin? What languages do you speak?

2. What is your major?

3. How long have you lived in the US? Could you tell me about how you came to Memphis (or your current location)?

4. Could you tell me why you moved to the US with your partner?

5. Could you tell me a little bit about your living situation? Do you live alone or with a partner? Do you work?

6. What was your hope for your life in the US? What did you imagine it would be like or what did you want when you moved?

7. Could you talk about your integration into US society? What have been the major challenges? What has been easy?

8. What was the transition like for your partner?

9. How many children do you have and what are their ages?

10. What was the transition like for your children (if you have any)?

11. Did you need to learn English as a second language when you arrived? What has that experience been like?

12. How many courses did you take? How long have you been studying English since you arrived in the US?

13. Which level are you in? Do you think it is serving your language needs?

14. What language skill do you think you need to learn the most?

15. What do you expect from a language teacher and institution?

16. What do you like/dislike about your experience learning English?

17. Could you explain your language learning challenges?

18. Did you ever think about quitting your English classes? Why? What made you stay?

19. What would you suggest to help motivate female dependent students to learn?

20. What advice would you give your younger self before you left home?

21. Is there anything you would like to add? Anything I missed?

Second Interview

1. How were your courses?

2. How well did you do this semester?

3. What were your hardest and easiest courses?

4. Have you considered dropping the courses? If so, was it for family, economic, social, or educational problems? Please explain.

5. Do you think you could learn English outside the classroom? How?

6. Does the institution encourage social interactions along with coursework to help you practice English? Could you give examples?

7. Could you explain how important is it to have female Saudi classmates?

8. What is your attitude toward the American classroom in terms of a co-ed environment, the teacher's role, groupwork, homework duties, class participation, and social interactions?

9. Do you think it is easier to learn English in the US or in Saudi Arabia? Why?

10. Are your children bilingual? What has it been like raising bilingual children (if you have any)?

11. What do you think contributes to you as a language learner?

12. Do your partner and children (if you have any) help you learn English?

13. What language or languages do you speak at home? Do you have rules about language at home?

14. What language or languages do you use outside of home? Where and when do you use English?

15. Do you usually practice speaking English? Where?

16. Do your children or other family members have opinions about the way you speak or use language?

17. Do you think that other people (e.g., in public) have opinions about the way you speak? Can you tell me about a time when someone has commented on your language?

18. What would you suggest to help motivate female dependent students to learn?

19. What advice would you give your younger self before you left home?

20. What advice would you give your teachers or program administrators?

21. Is there anything you would like to add? Anything I missed?

Weekly Interview Questions for Follow-Up Interviews

1. How was your week?

2. Did you learn anything new?

3. Did you face any challenges?

4. Is there anything else you want to talk about or tell me?