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## The Experience Of Saudi Students Writing Academic English In Sex-Separated Classrooms

Rana Alsaadi

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THE EXPERIENCE OF SAUDI STUDENTS WRITING ACADEMIC ENGLISH IN SEX-  
SEPARATED CLASSROOMS

by

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A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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To my parents (Saleh and Jamilah,) to my husband (Mohammed,) to my children (Laura, Rose, and the child in my womb), and to my sisters I love you all and I hope you're proud of this accomplishment. !ممتته لأنكم عائلتي

## **ABSTRACT**

This is a qualitative research that investigates the experiences of undergraduate Saudi female and male students majoring in English at Taif University, Saudi Arabia. These students were part of different sections of a course that teaches academic English writing and research in an English as a Foreign Language context. These Saudi female and male students draw on their perceptions of three main points; First, how they experienced the academic English writing course in sex-separated classrooms. Second, how the current sex-separated classrooms influence their learning of English and how if this hypothetically change to mixed-sex classrooms their experiences in learning English might change. Third, this research explores the students' practice of "Translanguaging" learning English in general and writing in specific in their sex-separated sections of the academic English writing course. The focus on translanguaging in this research considers it as a break and shift from the traditional standard way English and academic English writing is taught to non-native speakers/ learners of English.

This is a phenomenological study that uses feminist standpoint theory as its main theoretical analysis of the phenomena explored. Major findings of the study include clear discrepancy in the way women are taught English and academic English writing compared to men, the feeling of pressure shared between women to master English, the relatively shared excitement about mixed education by women, and that the practice of translanguaging in itself is gendered, since female students experience less flexibility and tolerance in using Arabic in the classroom than men.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Around 9 years ago, I came to the United States to pursue a master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language as part of The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Scholarship Program in Saudi Arabia. As part of the scholarship program, Saudi students in the United States were given the opportunity to study the English language in English as a Second Language (ESL) institutes around the US, and I was enrolled in one of those programs. Those ESL classes marked the first time that I physically experienced being part of mixed-sex classes. Female and male students from different countries, including Saudi Arabia, shared language learning classes that focused on different skills and subjects in the English language, such as reading, writing, and grammar. Besides learning English, the goal of those classes was to prepare students for the academic system in the US. Since it was a new experience for me, I was highly alerted to what goes on in those classes. I was particularly interested in the way Saudi female and male students<sup>1</sup> behaved in class, including their reaction to the instructions given to them, their interactions with students from other nationalities, and with their interactions with each other.

During those language classes, both Saudi female and male students were active and wanted to benefit from the experience of being enrolled in an English language institute at a US university. However, I noticed that the Saudi female students' language was more developed than the Saudi male students, even though both were at the same language proficiency level. Their language was either more grammatically correct or more lexically rich. Also, when

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<sup>1</sup> "female" and "male" are the English terms for biological sex, I am using them here because there are no terms that refers to "gender" in the Arabic language except female and male. Further details later.

students were asked to write something on the board, the spelling of female students was most of the time more accurate than the male students. Besides, when we shared grades for writing assignments with each other the female students always had higher grades. Those observations made me think of how our experiences as Saudi female students and Saudi male students in the language classroom are noticeably different, even though we receive the same language instruction from the same instructors.

I never forgot that experience, those observations and thoughts have been stored in my memory until I started my doctoral program at the University of North Dakota (UND.) When it was time to think about a project for my doctoral degree, a question that came to mind was whether or not the experiences of female and male students in the sex-separated higher education in Saudi Arabia were similar to the ones I observed in the mixed-sex education in the US. I knew I had to investigate this question because it was interesting to see how the performance of Saudi female and male students was not the same, even though we shared the same class and the same instructor. I was especially interested in writing because I remember a vast difference in learning and practicing English writing between Saudi students of the two sexes. I thought it would be interesting to explore the experiences of Saudi female and male students of an academic writing course, but in separate classes. Usually, college classes that focus on academic English writing are taught to English majors. Therefore, this research focuses on Saudi female and male English-major students who have experience in an academic writing course at a Saudi university.

The first place that I thought of as a location to conduct my research is my alma mater, Taif University in Taif, Saudi Arabia. I am a graduate of the Department of Foreign Languages at Taif University. I graduated in 2011 with a bachelor's degree in English. I knew there is no

better place to conduct this research than the university where I did my undergraduate study. I wanted to know if the experiences of female English-major students resembled my experience when I was a college student there. As the situation in most Saudi higher institutions, male students are physically separated from female students in separate buildings in Taif University. There is a male section (a male branch) and a female section (a female branch) of the university in different areas of the city<sup>2</sup>. The faculty teaching in each branch is usually the same sex as the students. Some exceptions occur every now and then for female students when sometimes they have a male professor or instructor teaching them through a distance system similar to TV circuits, with the help of a female supervisor<sup>3</sup>. When I was a student at the Department of Foreign Languages, class size in the female section was approximately 20 to 30 female students per class. I remember taking a range of classes in English studies varying between literature, linguistics, and translation. The focus was mostly on English literature since most of the classes given were literature classes.

I remember back then, females majoring in English had a prestigious status among other majors within the same college. This prestigious status extended to places beyond the university as society in general admires those who speak other languages, especially English. I think this view of English as a prestigious language comes from the east admiration of the development of western societies, which is a view shared by Arab countries as well. There is this stereotypical view of English majors as being smart, classy, and having access to knowledge that nobody else but them has, especially female English majors<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> These two branches were not the only two branches of the university, as there are different locations for the university in other areas.

<sup>3</sup> The female supervisor has duties like keeping class in order or taking attendance or giving students the microphone when they speak to the male professor.

<sup>4</sup> Four female students in this study confirmed this view of English majors indicating that this admiration stems from society not just the university, while only one male student indicated that being an English major is a source of pride for him because not everyone knows English.



A logical explanation for this prestigious view of English majors stems from Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism*. Said (1978) defines Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" [the East] and (most of the time) "the Occident" [the West]." (p.2) The distinction between the Orient and the Occident in Said's (1978) scholarship is related to the preconceived perceptions and stereotyping of generally Middle Eastern people. The idea is that these people are uncivilized and barbarians and are in desperate need for help from the west to make their lives better and to modernize them. Ultimately, it was a justification for western colonialism of the East. As a result of the western conquest of the east, the languages of the colonizers found their way into most of the Arab countries. The British specifically had influence over the Arab-speaking populations close to the Arabian Peninsula. Anna Corrad (2017) reports that "until the 19th century, the British were the major superpower, and their method of colonization included establishing schools which taught English language and Western culture to locals who needed to be "modernized." I believe this early invasion of English in those colonies, established the base for the view of English as a prestigious language. It unconsciously made English a prestigious language in the minds of the Arab people whether they like it or not. I think it was difficult to dismiss viewing English as prestigious particularly after it has gained a global status for being the language of science and technology.

### **The Relevance of Feminist Standpoint Theory to the Project**

With setting up the background of this study, it is essential to write about the use of the feminist standpoint theory in this project. First, I believe it is essential that I define what feminism and feminist standpoint mean. Susan Mann (2012) describes feminism as part of "everyday discourse" meaning that it cannot be separated from everyday life because everyday

life is the focus of it. She emphasizes that feminism is not just a single perspective, but rather entails multiple perspectives and so it is complex to define as a single entity. (p.2) However, if I were to give a single definition of Feminism, I would pick the definition of Charlotte Bunch (1983) as reported by Susan Mann (2012), “it is an entire world view or gestalt, not just a laundry list of ‘women’s issues’. Feminist theory provides a basis for understanding every area of our lives, and a feminist perspective can affect the world politically, culturally, economically, and spiritually.” (p.3)

It is important to note that the word “feminism” in itself doesn’t align with a positive connotation in most Arab countries. What is understood of the word is not received well by many Arabs, as a matter of fact, the word could be very disturbing and irritating to some. Feminism is understood as calling for equality between men and women with a sense of hatred towards all men and a hatred towards patriarchy in general. The most popular opinion of feminism in the Arab world is that it calls for rejection of all men, viewing them as constant oppressors no matter who they are or what they do. However, what is not popular about feminism is the fact that it has many doctrines and schools, and it carries different perspectives of different feminists. This is unknown to many Arabs and is constantly being limited to the one idea introduced earlier. I guess what makes that single thought about feminism popular in the Arab world is that when feminism was first introduced to the Arab world around the 1970s, many Arab men took it as a challenge to their eastern masculinity. This eastern masculinity promotes men as sole providers for families and women as housewives taking care of families. Obviously, these roles was and is still disputed by many, but it’s important to note that it is rooted in the Arab world as many places around the world.

Falls under feminism is feminist standpoint theory, that is defined by Sandra Harding

(2004) as a theory “to explain how certain kinds of politics do not block the growth of knowledge but, rather, can stimulate and guide it” (p. 2). The theory in a way extends feminist concerns to every aspect of natural and social order seeing it as valuably informing theoretical, methodological, and political thought in general. Feminist standpoint theory came to challenge a long-held belief that since feminism is a political movement, it will “obstruct and damage the production of scientific knowledge.” (p.1) The theory is characterized on one hand, as “explanatory and normative” because it included “conventional” opinions of the fields it explored; and on the other hand, as “controversial” because it targeted topics that were controversial. Moreover, the theory is characterized as “a way of empowering oppressed groups, of valuing their experiences, and of pointing toward a way to develop an “oppositional consciousness”” (p. 2). Meaning that the aim of the theory is to highlight the stories of the marginalized and acknowledge their experience to challenge what is constructed as standards with aim to change and reform.

Another explanation of feminist standpoint theory is provided through the term “the sexual division of labor” that Nancy Hartsock (1983) identifies as the basis for the feminist standpoint. By this term, she means the daily activities that are socially deemed as men’s or women’s. She calls this “the structures which define women’s activity as contributors to subsistence and as mothers.” (as cited in Harding, 2004, p.36) Analyzing the division of labor leads to epistemological moments that structure the feminist standpoint. Hartsock (1983) indicates that “claiming women’s lives differ structurally from those of men” lead to a women’s vantage point that is not available to men writing, “women’s lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy.” (as cited in Harding, 2004, p.36) As a result, Hartsock (1983) points out to the position of women in the division of labor as powerful.

Through women's perspectives, more undiscovered knowledge about society and the world is made. In describing this Hartsock (1983) writes, "A standpoint, however, carries with it the contention that there are some perspectives on society from which, however well-intentioned one may be, the real relations of humans with each other and with the natural world are not visible" (as cited in Harding, 2004, p.36) Furthermore, Hartsock (1983) calls for feminist theorists to "demand that feminist theorizing be grounded in women's material activity." (as cited in Harding, 2004, p.49)

The reason I chose feminist standpoint as a lens to analyze this project through is because it is the most adequate theory to study a sex-separated environment. Generally, women's lived experiences are underrepresented and marginalized due to the patriarchal nature of societies that centralizes men's experience and analyzes women's experiences in society through the men's point of view. However, feminist standpoint theory promotes the study of societies through women's standpoints and perceptions whose experiences and knowledge are central to understanding a specific society, in this case an educational setting. This is not to say that the standpoint of men is invalid, but it supplements that of women, so in this manner the equation flips to centralizing women's lived experiences and marginalizing the men's experience where it would be looked at through the women's experiences. So, it is needless to say that in this project, the women's standpoints and my own standpoint as a Saudi female scholar are emphasized over the men's. Combining all these standpoints while investigating the research questions of this project gives this project a unique and complex outlook.

### **How the View of the Saudi Women Developed**

In my perspective, the common view of Saudi women as being incapable of accomplishing things as men, did not stem from the Saudi society itself, nor was it originated

on the Saudi land, but rather was introduced to society when foreign interests began to increase in the oil-rich country. There are two sources for this foreign ideology. First, westerners came to the country for several reasons, the most important being working in the booming oil fields and industry in Saudi Arabia. In the late 1930s, westerners who were mostly men came and brought with them the western view of what women can and can't do, and they passed it on to the Saudi society. Although many might argue that western countries, like the US, came to Saudi Arabia and brought with them westernization<sup>5</sup>, I argue that they brought with them the view of women as well. Prior to the 1960s women's movement in the US, western women were struggling to prove their active role as valuable members of society. A role that needed to be outlined away from the home and the family.

One of the reasons for the women's movement is that women wanted to be viewed as someone capable of doing anything in life just like men. Dania Ammar (2018) described the feminists' demands in the 1960 women's movement writing, "feminists at that time worked diligently to reinstate women's belief in themselves and secure equality, especially in the workplace. Those feminists realized that attaining women's rights in the public domain is inseparable from attaining women's rights in the private, personal domain, e.g., issues involving sexuality, body image, and childcare." (p.22) All those issues were the concerns of the western woman especially the American woman at the time. Women were asking for those rights because they were not receiving them from men who were (and still are) leading in western societies.

The concerns of the western women at the time, were not necessarily the concerns of the Saudi women. At the time, Saudi Arabia was just starting to rise as a country, and the arrival of

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<sup>5</sup> Westernization is defined by Annemarie van Geel (2016) as "copy-pasting whatever comes from America or Europe: food, clothes, speech, and morals."

male western oil engineers and workers has definitely influenced how male Saudis viewed their lives and their women in a way that was not common before. In fact, Annemarie van Geel (2016) claimed that “the development of women-only public spaces is connected to the Saudi state’s enrichment after the discovery and exploitation of oil.” (p. 360) This is evidence that women were part of public spaces all the time and were contributing to life outside of the house before the oil discovery. The intruding western view of women carried out stereotypical roles for both genders in the Saudi society. For example, a stereotypical role for a female or a female’s job is inside the house doing chores and raising kids only, while a male’s job is outside the house being the sole breadwinner. Also, this western view looked at women at the time as incapable of performing physically or mentally complex activities such as lifting heavy items or solving mathematical problems. This inadequate and unfair view of women was unconsciously passed on to many Saudis at the time, who were fascinated by westerners’ development, and with time it changed how the majority of the society looked at women.

Now I believe that the second source for the foreign ideology about women is, Arabs who carried the beliefs of the Muslim Brotherhood Organization. Laurence Caromba and Hussein Solomon (2008) describe the movement behind this organization as “one of the oldest and most influential Islamist movements in the world and seeks to impose a fundamentalist vision on Egyptian society,” and has “developed a coherent ideology of radical Islam.” (p. 118) During the 1950s, Saudi Arabia was starting to develop, and the quality of life was starting to flourish, the educational system was one of the major life components that needed work. Since there were not many educated Saudis to build and work in the educational field, it was a must to find who can do the job in an efficient time.

According to Habib Toumi (2017), Arabs who carried the brotherhood ideology “came

in regular contact with Saudis in the 1950s when thousands of Egyptian teachers were recruited to work in Saudi Arabia's new public schools." A large number of the Muslim brotherhood Arabs traveled to participate in the development of the newly established Saudi Arabia. Many of them worked in different educational jobs including, designing books, administration, and teaching. As the familiarity of the Brotherhood ideology grew, more Saudis were in contact with the extreme ideologies it carried. Part of this ideology was the extreme dismissal of women as a vital part of society. Unfortunately, as a result many educators, who were men, carried strict views about the roles of women. Many of these views were incorporated in curriculums and in the subjects that were taught in schools for children.

As a female, growing up in middle and high school, we had three choices for one required "life skills" class. One is "Art", the second is "Cooking", and the last one is "Sewing". As far as I know, none of these options were given to male students; instead, they had a "Sports" class which at the time was not given to females. I believe this stress on female students to learn how to cook or sew is nothing but an extension of the strict views on what a female's role should be in life that many of those Arabs carried on to the Saudi society. Imagine the impact of those views about women on generations from the 1950s until seven years ago, when Saudi Arabia declared the Muslim Brotherhood Organization as a terrorist group because of the multiple disruptive ideologies it adopts.

With that being outlined, I believe that the influence of the oil-fields westerners and the Muslim Brotherhood Arabs on the way society view women did not happen overnight, but it took time until it created an embedded stereotypical view of women that is unique to the place and time. The strict ideologies in society stabilized its roots after the 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and the claims of society becoming western (hence TVs and shows." This

has led to calls for society to repudiate the West and return to “the original Islam” which resulted in what is popularly known as “Sahwa.” After this, it seemed that people were becoming stricter in ways that never existed before.

### **The Underrepresentation of the Empowered Saudi Women**

Many examples of Saudi women from daily life offer proof of my theory about how Saudi society originally didn't see women as second citizens. On a national level, one of the most influential and known women in Saudi history is Princess Nora Bint Abdulrahman. She is the sister of King Abdelaziz Ibn Saud, the founder of the current Saudi Arabia. According to Al-Sudairy (2017), “She is remembered as a supporter, social worker and as the first lady who supported her brother ... She looked after every member in the family and opened her house for commoners to visit, dine, and even helped in solving their problems. History remembers her as the one who encouraged her brother after being defeated for the second time.” (p.11) One of the interesting stories that marks King Abdelaziz's pride in his sister is how he was saying “Akhw Nora” or I am the brother of Nora, when he was fighting to regain his family's rule of the Saudi land. The use of this phrase has extended to be an indication of how women were the symbol of pride in their families in Saudi Arabia. Phrases like “a daughter of men” or “a sister of men” or “I am the brother of (a woman's name)” are still heard in society today. These phrases are used as a sign of admiration to refer to women who are proven to be powerful or honorable. I believe that the fact that they are still used today is proof that women were given a status that did not consider them as inferior to men.

Originally, women were viewed as life partners in every life aspect. On a personal level, growing up, I remember hearing stories from my grandmother about a time in the past when she was younger, and people were living in villages as brothers and sisters. I was told that there was



not a strict gender separation line as we know it today, and that she was expected to work on the farm or herd the sheep and cows just like her husband. In fact, it was expected of the females in the family to take care of the farm animals more than the males. When a male guest visited and my grandfather was not home, it was considered very rude to tell the guest not to come in and have coffee. This is a vast difference from today, where it's the norm is to tell the male guest to come another time when "the man of the house" is available. I know for a fact that these traits from the past were not just exclusive to my grandparents' village, but it was shared across villages and tribes including Bedouin living in the Arabian Peninsula desert. HEND AL-SUDAIRY (2017) describing the role of Bedouin women wrote:

The Bedouin woman lived a relatively free and mobile life. Even before the formation of the Kingdom, women had ridden to war alongside tribal men, and had even held such positions as an expert physician. They had carried familial responsibilities in the absence of men during the poverty of the 19th century. Being veiled in some regions did not exclude the woman from her society or her active role either in teaching, religion or literature (poetry). Some dedicated religious books for readers and made these books available for all at a time when illiteracy was the norm. (P.2)

The other powerful female who had a major influence in my development as a young girl is my other grandmother who was by that time's standards very independent. She began working in the fields and with animals just like other villagers, but when life changed in the country and people started to seek stable jobs in the 1970s, she got a job in the city working among the service team in a female elementary school. At the time, women working in paying jobs like the one my grandmother occupied was not very common. I think she was among the first females in my family occupying an official paying job at the time. She moved from the

village to the city to work in that job. Her house in the city became like “a care house” for young male relatives who came to the city to enroll in high schools because there was not one for them in the village. So besides working in the school system, she was caring for these young men at her house. Her financial independence and stability carried with her throughout her life until she died, her own money paid for all of her funeral expenses.

These examples of empowered women from my immediate family are proof that originally Saudi women were viewed as important. Al-Sudairy (2017) describes the Saudi woman as “the outside world thinks of her as an ignorant, oppressed woman, while the truth is that she is not.” (p.1) I understand that the view I present here is different from the common discourse about the view of the Saudi women; however, I believe that it is important to highlight this perspective as a challenge for the previous stereotypical view. Uma Narayan (2004) writes:

concrete embodiments as members of a specific class, race, and gender as well as our concrete historical situations necessarily play significant roles in our perspective on the world; moreover, no point of view is "neutral" because no one exists unembedded in the world. Knowledge is seen as gained not by solitary individuals but by socially constituted members of groups that emerge and change through history. (p. 220)

Al-Sudairy (2017) Indicated how it was difficult to find documentation of the Saudi women’s authentic experiences and issues due to many reasons. Some of the rare publications found were either written by men, so they represented a male’s standpoint, or written by western women, so they represented the view of someone who did not understand the culture. Al-Sudairy (2017) confirms “this lack of documentation led to the creation of a dim view of the Arabian Peninsula’s women, and consequently helped construct a stereotypical image of the

woman as a submissive, marginalized being who has no societal role whatsoever.” (p.5)

Therefore, I hope that by documenting the experiences of my two grandmothers here that I contribute to saving some of those untold female stories.

### **The Saudi Women Standpoint in the Past**

To establish the Saudi women standpoint, we need to specifically look at what it meant to be a Saudi woman in the past. Although being a Saudi woman in Saudi Arabia might look different to different individuals, it had some shared characteristics that the Saudi women experienced daily. Being a Saudi woman in the past meant that you are expected to have a life that revolved around family. Whether you are married or single, taking care of your family is the first role you need to fulfill in life. Even if you are expected to do well in school, you are not expected to get a job, but rather get married and build a family. Even if you were employed, your priority needs to always be your family. The money you make is not essential because your husband is expected to provide for you. Also, as a woman you had to deal with the male guardianship system that constrains your ability to travel or work, especially if that male guardian (father or husband) is someone who likes control, imagine the difficulty in dealing with that.

Also, as a Saudi working woman, it has been socially and cultural structured that you would only occupy very few jobs because it would be the most fitting jobs for you as a woman. Teaching was the most preferred occupation because you would not be dealing with the opposite sex, and you would only work in female only environments. Most other occupations were commonly rejected by your family because it would involve partial or full interaction with the opposite sex, including being a medical doctor. However, some families accepted that their daughters major in medicine and become medical doctors due to the high reputation and pay

that comes with becoming a doctor. Obviously, some families did not agree with this socially structured law, but they did not reject it either fearing being discarded by the majority. Also, it is important to note that in the past, certain fields were not available to the Saudi women to study or work like law or military.

Moreover, as a Saudi woman navigating public spaces, you were not allowed and expected to wear anything but a black robe (Abaya) in public. Also, black face cover was the norm and rarely women uncovered their faces. The religious police, that used to have the power to monitor everyone's behavior and enforce punishment, were monitoring the dress of women in public spaces. Generally, women did not violate the black dress code or the face covering, not because all agreed with it, but to avoid the confrontation with the religious police that could become very humiliating.

Going out and using most public spaces or services, as women you had your own separate section called family or women section. Places like banks, restaurants, universities all had separate sections for women. All these places had a strict line where a woman would rarely use the section made for men because she would feel and see strange looks from men that would make her feel uncomfortable. As a female, you were expected to not attract men's attention with the way you speak or dress, even though in Islam men are instructed to lower their gaze.

As a female, who could not drive in the past, waiting for a male from your family to take you anywhere was a struggle if you didn't have a family driver. Even with a family driver, it was hard sometimes to organize your schedule with the other females in the family to be able to have him drive you anywhere. As a female college student, classes that did not start until later in the day was normal. So if you were to leave the university campus to go home or

anywhere else during that wait time, you would need to have a personal driver waiting outside to pick you up and bring you back again, which is a luxury that many female students did not have. Therefore, most females ride in a shared minibus service<sup>6</sup> that has a fixed schedule, meaning that leaving campus is not practical nor convenient.

On the subject of Saudi female students and since the focus of this research is Saudi women majoring in English, it is important to understand why Saudi female students seemed more advanced in their language performance than Saudi male students. This is part of the Saudi women standpoint learning English in the past. Going back to the idea of considering English as a prestigious language, although I can't speak for everyone here, but I believe that in the Saudi context the view of English being prestigious was popular among Saudi women more than Saudi men. This has played a role in these women choosing English as major. The most important priority for women in the conservative Saudi society is taking care of their families inside the house, so communicating outside of the house in a foreign language was not on the list of priorities for many of Saudi women. Hend Al-Sudairy (2017) explains this saying, "although the Saudi woman has always had her status given within her home and among her family, a role outside it was not granted to many." (p.2) Although this was still speaking truth to reality about Saudi women status when I was a college student, it was changing for many women at the time. The status of majoring in English brought with it confidence and pride to many Saudi female students, where they just fell in love with the language and studied it hard.

Also, another possible justification for the advanced language performance of Saudi female students that contributes to the standpoint of Saudi women learning English is the way

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<sup>6</sup> This shared bus service could be a small company with several minibuses and Saudi drivers who have the job of driving females from their homes to college or school or vice versa. Or it could be a Saudi driver with a minibus who would do the same services. I can imagine that now such driving services might be declining as more females learn to drive and get their own cars.

they were raised. In the past, unfortunately, many families in the Saudi society, represented mostly in the men of the family, have questioned the capability of women to do things in life evident in the previous law of guardianship. Due to society's constant feeding of the idea of women's inferiority to men led many women to carry the belief of being in a lower status than men while growing up. This had influenced women feeling of wanting to prove that they can accomplish anything just like men. For example, in my previous experience in the language classroom in the US, I have noticed that most Saudi female students tried to be as accurate as they can when they spoke or wrote in English. I believe that the reason for being extra cautious to not make mistakes is because they did not want their peers or instructors to question their abilities in mastering the language since they're women, which for Saudi male students is likely not in question.

Another addition to the standpoint of Saudi women learning English, and a reason for why Saudi female students seemed more advanced in their language performance is the fact that these female students have more responsibilities. As indicated earlier whether single or married women have responsibilities expected of them to meet inside the house. Responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, taking care of kids or younger siblings are typically expected from women more than men in Saudi society. All these responsibilities had put pressure on women to take their education seriously and dedicate a specific time for studying their language courses. They know for a fact that if they didn't organize their time, these responsibilities would easily become overwhelming to the point where women don't have time to do anything, let alone study for courses. So, dedicating a specific time and spot to study, and maintaining it, gave Saudi female students an advantage over their male counterparts, and their efforts showed in their developed language skills.

From these explanations, it is clear that the standpoint of Saudi women learning English indicate a pressure imposed on women more than men due to the different factors mentioned above. However, it is important to note that having more advanced language skills did not make these women more qualified in the job market, as many employment opportunities were not available for them in the past. Although women might had been more skillful in the language, their employment opportunities were limited to a few fields with education taking the lion's share; however, this has changed currently.

### **The Saudi Women Standpoint Considering Recent Changes**

In 2022, the Saudi woman has never enjoyed living in the country as she does today. When King Salman bin Abdelaziz became the king in 2015, many positive changes began to take place in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In 2017, Saudi society started to experience massive new changes for what was perceived as normal before. Those changes were particularly important to all Saudi women who began to experience newly granted rights in many aspects of life. The right to drive a car, the right to travel and obtain a passport without a guardian's consent, and the right to access education and healthcare without a guardian's consent were all part of rights that were granted to women in recent years. Women empowerment was part of the Saudi Vision 2030 that was created in 2016 by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who explicitly supports the empowerment of Saudi women at all levels and in many fields. According to Moskovsky & Picard (2018), the 2030 vision is "a planned methodology and roadmap for economic and developmental action." (p.160) The Saudi Vision 2030 statement explicitly declares the development of the country by the equal participation of men and women and grants equal opportunities for both men and women. This is a language that was not commonly used before, as the lines to what a female can and cannot

do were visibly outlined in the past.

With these recent changes, I believe the Saudi women standpoint has dramatically changed. In 2022, the contribution of the Saudi woman can be seen and felt everywhere you go in the country. As a matter of fact, nowadays, there is not a field that females cannot be part of. As a Saudi woman, I feel enormously proud to see the Saudi woman entering fields that were not available for her before. Recent images of female police officers at the holy mosque of Makkah are heartwarming because they are evidence that the conversations that had occurred in society in the past about “appropriate” female jobs, should not have occurred in the first place. Another example of these changes took place in the highest-ranked higher education institute in the Arab world, King Fahd University of Petroleum & Mineral (KFUPM). This university has the top science and engineering program in the country and the region, its focus is mainly on petroleum and mineral resources. Until early 2021, KFUPM only accepted male students on its campus, but it had changed this policy and declared that it is open for enrollment of both female and male students later in the year.

Also, the standpoint of the Saudi woman after the change became more optimistic and enthusiastic. If she is seeking education or employment, she can follow her dreams in becoming whoever she wants without fear of facing opposition from family or society. Focusing on the Saudi workplace, the Saudi women have more freedom to contribute to the job compared to her situation before. She has more roles and responsibilities than before, but compared to the Saudi man, she is still inferior in some power positions. For example, managing positions are still dominantly male. Also, there is no female minister of any of the ministries in Saudi Arabia. However, it is important to mention that this might change because the undergoing changes in Saudi Arabia and the Saudi woman empowerment is happening fast.



As a Saudi woman navigating the public domain currently, you can dress in whichever way you see appropriate considering the public decency laws that are set for anyone and everyone in Saudi Arabia. As a woman you have the freedom to wear any color you see fit, and to present yourself in any way you like. Also, more and more places and services relaxed the lines between female and male sections of public places and services. Many more spaces have no more separate sections where everyone and anyone is welcome to be served in a single spot. As a Saudi woman, you now have more freedom and fluidity to access spaces that were not open for you before, including men only restricted areas; however, some everyday spaces are still strictly separated including higher education.

To have sex-separated spaces puts social and cultural regulations and rules over the daily life of Saudi women more than men. It has been this way all the time. And the strict line between men and women in daily life always existed. However, now, with the changes women are experiencing more freedom and authority over many more spaces and roles in society than before, but the separation still exists in some places including higher education. With the new freedoms in daily life and the separation still in existence in higher education, the Saudi woman seems to experience a new norm daily. She navigates more flexible social and cultural regulations and rules in life generally, but not that much in higher education. With that being said, nothing is far from happening as some of these inflexibilities are possible candidates to change in the near future. Meaning that higher education could be the following spot for change and reform.

Just like any society in the world, change is not for everyone. In the Saudi context, there is no question that the newly granted rights for Saudi women have some opposing critics. However, I think that the refusal here is a refusal of changing one's status and one's way of

living, not a refusal of women's vital role in society. The changes are implemented in the shape of governmental laws and regulations. Also, many corporations have created new policies within their private establishments to empower the Saudi woman as a response to the Saudi Vision 2030. Therefore, critics will sooner or later ride the wheel of change because it is time to change.

### **Defining Important Terms for the Research**

**Sex-separation and not gender-separation :** the meaning of gender doesn't exist in Arabic.

Linguistically speaking, the word "gender" doesn't exist in the Arabic language; what exists is the word "aljins," which means both gender and sex. This clarification is important to mention because "aljins" could mean the biological difference between female and male or sexual intercourse. These two meanings show that gender in Arabic is not understood as "gender identity" in English, but instead, the word "gender" does not have an equivalent in Arabic.

However, I have seen on Twitter, a famous female Saudi intellectual uses the word "al-gendreh" to refer to the socio-cultural characteristics and roles associated with females and males. This looks like an Arabization of the word "gender;" as I have referred to earlier, there is no equivalent to the word "gender" in Arabic. Because of this, in this dissertation, the word gender could be used interchangeably with sex due to the lack of distinction in Arabic, which makes it difficult to distinguish in the writing of this dissertation that focuses on an Arabic context.

Also, it's important to note that the use of the word "gender" in this project is confined to the use of the word in the Saudi context and abides by the Saudi government definition as to what gender is. In 2016, Saudi Arabia voted against the United Nations (UN) resolution on "Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, and gender identity." Some of what this resolution called for is implementing human rights acts to

“overcome violence and discrimination against persons on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity” (United Nations Human Rights website). As reported in the UN news report, Saudi Arabia requested “a no-action motion” on the resolution, calling it “a deeply divisive proposal that failed to recognize cultural differences.” It saw the resolution as “imposing” the point of view of certain countries about “certain so-called human rights concepts or ideas” on other countries, and that it was against “religion.” When specifically the topic of gender came up, Saudi Arabia referred to “the concepts of sexual orientation or gender identity” as being “not recognized under international law, and were unclear” and that the country doesn’t agree on these rights and this “should be left for States to decide, not the United Nations.” Finally, in that session, Saudi Arabia believed that the resolution “went contrary to its sacred values” because “it sought to impose issues that were prohibited by Saudi Arabia’s religion,” which is obviously a reference to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Beyond that UN resolution, the Saudi Arabian United Nations website provides a document that explicitly explains gender justice and law in the country. According to that document, sexual freedom doesn’t exist in the country, as it explicitly states that “under Sharia law, consensual same-sex sexual conduct is punishable by death or flogging, depending on the perceived seriousness of the case.” Also, the document states that gender identity is restricted to female and male, as “it is illegal to behave as the opposite sex.” Marriage is also defined as “a formal contract between a male and a female.” The document also confirms that “the only way an individual can get a sex-reassignment surgery is if they are ‘intersex people.’” With this in mind, it is clear that the position Saudi Arabia takes on gender freedom abides with the Islamic position, which understands gender as only binary and not like what many western societies perceive as non-binary.

**Sex-separation and not sex segregation:** As a researcher, I believe using the word sex-separated classrooms is more accurate and appropriate. The use of the term separation instead of segregation is used in this project because in education men and women are separated in similar and equal buildings and facilities, and they get similar and equal types of education. Therefore, the quality of men's classrooms and services are not better than women's. Annemarie van Geel (2016) describes the separation in the Saudi public domain as one that “does not relegate women's participation to the realm of domesticity, but rather separates men and women in the public domain. As such, it is a development that has led to the coming about of extensive separate public spaces that are only for women.”

**Ikhtilat:** mixing between the sexes or between females and males. Jawaher Alwedinani (2016) defines “Ikhtilat” as “the mingling between men and women.” She indicates that it “plays a large role in influencing the decision of Saudi fathers in allowing their daughters to choose their field of study regardless of whether the prohibition of Ikhtilat comes from Islamic religion or Arab tribal customs and traditions.” (p.79)

**Multilingualism/Bilingualism:** the ability to communicate in two or more languages. In this project, all participants are fluent in Arabic, their mother tongue, and presumably intermediate fluency in English because they are English majors.

**Translanguaging:** a new concept in multilingual studies that is structured on the basis of using a learner's native language while learning their second or third language. In this research, it is using the Arabic language while the Saudi students learn English. Both languages are interwoven or meshed. Further detentions and descriptions of the term will be provided later.

**Feminist standpoint theory:** a theory that values women's experiences and opinions of life by viewing them as distinctive and realistic. In this project, the standpoint of female and male

participants are examined, as well as my own unique standpoint as a researcher and as a Saudi woman.

The outlining of these terms is important to set the ground for the research questions of the project.

### **Research Questions**

This research offers answers to the following questions:

Q1 How do students (female and male) experience writing instruction in English as a foreign language classroom?

Q2 What are the students' perceptions about being in sex-separated writing courses and mixed-sex classes?

Q3 How does students' awareness of the historical and cultural origins of English academic language influence their attitudes about learning to write English?

Q4 What are the experiences of female and male Saudi EFL students with translanguaging in sex-separated writing courses?

The focus of these questions targets the internal experience of female and male English major students in a course called "Academic Research and Writing." This course primarily teaches academic English writing to female and male students who are non-native speakers of English and who are beginner to advanced English proficiency levels. Students are asked about their experiences in their separated classes of the course. Also, students are asked about their perceptions of the translanguaging concept and about the extent of using it in their separated classes. Ultimately, the research questions aim to capture students' perceptions of sex-separated classrooms, which they are part of, versus hypothetical mixed-sex classrooms. As with any other research, this research does not provide precise and one-mold-fits-all type of answers, but rather

provides intellectually motivating responses that bear criticism and debate. All the points presented here are based on the participants' individual responses and my interpretations of these responses. It's important to note here that my interpretations are based on my background knowledge as a student in the same institute, as an insider from within the Saudi culture, and as a researcher who aims to approach the data with a critical and analytical point of view.

### **Exigence of the Study**

This project conducts semi-structured interviews with female and male English major students and recent graduates at Taif University in Saudi Arabia. These students have experienced sex-separated classrooms for most of their lives; the purpose of this project is to qualitatively document and analyze their perceptions of the roles gender might play in their education in general, and in their English learning and writing acquisition more specifically. The Saudi Vision 2030 and the current economic and social changes in Saudi Arabia, open the possibility for mixed-sex classrooms in the future, making this research very timely. This research offers students who have mostly experienced sex-separated education, an opportunity to process their thoughts about this potential event. As English majors, they are likely to be future teachers of English, perhaps in mixed-sex classrooms. Also, having good English competency shall open many job opportunities for these graduates potentially in mixed-sex environments, which is something they have probably not experienced before. This project offers researchers and teachers data to consider classroom implications if Saudi EFL classrooms were to become mixed-sex.

Most of the research done so far in the field of teaching English writing in Saudi Arabia focuses on the difficulties faced by students learning English writing and the problems noticed by English writing instructors. It seems that the influence of sex-separated classrooms has not

been on the radar of English language learning research in Saudi Arabia, especially in the teaching of English academic writing. Moreover, to my knowledge, no discussion of gender and writing performance in Saudi English teaching classrooms was done through the lens of Feminist Standpoint theory, which is the theory I use to understand the responses of female and male students who take the English academic writing course. Also, part of examining the experiences of female and male English major students in a sex-separated English writing course, my research investigates how the concept of translanguaging takes place in that course, which to my knowledge has been in favor of “English only” instruction for so long. One of the most important questions this research answers is whether or not the use of translanguaging is gendered, meaning that it investigates the influence of the students' sex on the use of translanguaging in the course.

In light of the recent changes in Saudi Arabia, I want to see if the wheel of change approached the English language classroom in higher education, especially the academic English writing classroom. What perceptions will female and male students have of their current experiences in the sex-separated language classroom? And how does that compare to their perceptions of in a hypothetical mixed-sex language classroom? Given my observation about the superiority of Saudi female students' performance in language classrooms, a question that comes to mind is; would moving to mixed-sex classrooms change that observation? Or would it enforce or worsen the sides of the equation? Or would the whole situation change by female students raising the bar too high for male students to follow along? Another measure of the change in the English language classroom would be the way academic English language is taught. Were the methods of instruction keeping up with the outside social change? What is the instructor and students' relationship like? Is the use of the student's native language, Arabic, in

the instruction of English supported? What hinders the use of Arabic in academic English instruction?

Part of why I choose to conduct interviews with students for this project is that I feel Saudi higher education needs to give more authority to the students, they need to feel more in charge of their education. Their opinions and experiences, which might be invisible to instructors, are important. Also, there has been a need for more detailed and in-depth research in the Saudi context that uses methods beyond surveys and questionnaires, a need for interviews and one-on-one interaction between researchers and participants. This research should help in fulfilling this need in the Saudi intellectual world in general.

### **Project Methodology**

This is a phenomenological study that aims to describe how Saudi students perceive their experience learning English writing, a western language, in a classroom constructed and established according to the local and traditional division between genders. And how the description of this experience could inform pedagogical and social implications of potential mixed-sex classrooms in the future. Plus, this study highlights how separated female and male students' view translanguaging as part of their experience in the separated classroom, and in the writing course. According to David Woodruff Smith (2013), phenomenology is defined as “the study of structures of experience, or consciousness ... it studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first-person point of view.” (p.1) These students share their own perspective about what occurs in these single-sex language classes. Each one of these students sees the class according to his/her subjective consciousness. Accordingly, the two most important points that should be highlighted using the phenomenological theory are a description of what female and male students experience in sex-separated writing courses, and a description



of the writing courses that influenced how they experience being in sex-separated classrooms.

To be more specific, the phenomena that I want to study are the phenomena of being in a single-sex classroom learning the writing of a western language that comes from a place that does not typically separate the sexes in education. English-speaking countries usually do not separate genders in different life domains including education. The phenomenon of interest is common (and probably unique) for Saudi Arabia but is not considered a common phenomenon in the US or any other western country. Since this is phenomenological research, it hopes to make readers gain understanding of what it is like to be part of a single-sex education. It explores the experiences of male vs female students who learn a language and do not have their voices heard by those who teach them, while at the same time these students try to think of the possibility of mixed-sex education. It also explores the concept of translanguaging (that interested most of the participants) and how it might be used to shift the power dynamics in the classroom by granting students some authority over their learning.

Phenomenology as a philosophical movement was started by Edmund Husserl in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Nrayan Kafle (2011), Husserl believed in the existence of “double reality” or “double truths” as truth is either “phenomenological” or “natural” (p. 184). Beyond Husserl, many other philosophers emerged. One important name is Martin Heidegger, who moved away from the double truth to the “beings of being.” (Kafle, 2011, p. 184) Phenomenology to Heidegger “interpret[s] a type of experience by relating it to relevant features of context.” (Smith, 2013, p. 3) Out of this understanding of Phenomenology, Heidegger established a phenomenological research method called “Hermeneutic Phenomenology” which rejects “the idea of suspending personal opinions” and calls for “the turn for the interpretive narration to the description.” (Kafle, 2011, p. 186) This phenomenological

approach digs deeper in the person's experiences to "find the genuine objective nature of the things as realized by an individual." (Kafle, 2011, p. 186) It relies heavily on "interpretations" and the personal opinions and descriptions of researchers; this means that the researcher is not alienated from interpreting and describing the experiences in question. For my research, this means that I will rely on my personal interpretations while analyzing the interviews. Also, the analysis will involve detailed and heavy descriptions of what participants share. In other words, I will convey the standpoint each participant takes as a female or a male student from the experience, emphasizing the female student standpoint; while at the same time, reflecting on what the participants share using my own standpoint as a Saudi female English teacher.

Using a dual system of coding, I translate participants' responses then categorize those codes into bigger thematic codes. I found this to be the most suitable method for this project since the interviews were conducted in Arabic to give participants a space of freedom of expression. I found that the more I do the coding, the more I see some of the thematic codes increase in size, which indicate that participants were mentioning very similar ideas. I noticed that some themes were shared among female participants, but not male participants, and vice versa.

### **Description of the Coding Methods**

The coding system for the project mainly depends on two coding methods: in-vivo coding and descriptive coding. First, I "split the data into smaller codable moments" so I can manage it and have as much analysis of data as possible (Bernard, 2011, p. 379 as mentioned in Saldaña, 2016, p 24). Then, I used in-vivo coding or literal coding which depends on quoting literal participants' utterances and using that as the code itself. The only difference this project has using this coding method is that instead of quoting the Arabic phrase or sentence the

participants say, I quote a translation of that phrase or sentence. I tried my best to do literal translation. However, at times it was impossible to provide literal translation of what the participant said because what they said is embedded in a cultural symbol or a social ideology. Providing literal translation in those situations would have changed that participant's response completely. Codes that resulted from this method were highly unlikely to be repeated across transcripts. In other words, each code created is unique because it is the response of a specific participant and so repetition of the same response in the same structure or using the same word choices is highly unlikely. This is not to say that opinions, beliefs, ideas, or concepts might not be shared by other participants because this will likely happen, but to say that the difference is in the way each participant expresses themselves, which is unique to them.

The other coding method, descriptive coding, is exactly as the name suggests: descriptions of what the coded part is about or what it means. Codes that resulted from this method were more than likely repeated across transcripts, which helped during data analysis. In the descriptive analysis of codes, I looked for patterns among codes to build towards thematic interpretations. In this way, I was letting participants' perceptions lead the way.

Besides these coding methods, I have used a strategy of reading through the literal codes and the descriptive codes of each participant, and interpreting their response based on my knowledge of the society and my intuition of what they were referring to. Also, I was using the analytic memo writing feature that comes with each code I created. In those memos, I explained the code, or elaborated on the code, or commented my interpretation of what the code said, or recalled something that reminded me of what the code said, and at other times, I wrote a memo that is a mix of all the previous items. Those memos were very helpful when I started to analyze the data and write about it.

Although member checking was part of my initial plan for this project, it was not possible to accomplish due to some participants' change of communication methods, or not responding to the messages I have sent to them through our main form of communication, the app WhatsApp. Therefore, the trustworthiness of the data collected will be established through careful analysis of the interviews and through moments when I asked individual participants to verify paraphrases or summaries that show my understanding of their unclear responses during their interview.

### **Feminist Standpoint Theory and this Project**

Although the recent changes in Saudi Arabia have influenced every aspect and field of life quickly, it has slowly impacted higher education. It seems that there is a discrepancy between the level of disempowerment and control that women experience in education than in the workplace. Meaning that Saudi women experiences empowerment in workplaces of other fields more than in higher education. Tahani Alqahtani (2021) indicated that “there is lack of empowerment of women leaders in Saudi higher education and exclusion of women from some policies and regulations and from participating in decision-making.” (p.4) Before the recent changes, female sections of English departments, like any other departments, had limited power to implement policy changes or large decisions. This was typically in the hands of male sections. However, after the recent changes, this has shifted a little to engage female sections in “assistant” roles, yet this is slowly progressing.

There are multiple instances for Saudi women's standpoints throughout this research. However, since I'm focusing on Saudi women who study English, the standpoints I create here is for English-major Saudi women. It is important not to forget that female participants interviewed in the project are majoring in English, so they're not just merely learning English

courses to add to their skills, but they are depending on their degrees to build a lifelong career. Before the recent changes to empower the Saudi women, majoring in English was one of the preferred fields for women to find jobs and to support themselves and their families. Majoring in English for a Saudi woman meant obtaining a prestigious status. With a degree in English, a Saudi woman is more than likely going to find a job faster than any other major, especially in Education, the most preferred field for females. After the recent changes to empower the Saudi women, majoring in English gave these women chances to find jobs or pursue careers in much more fields than ever before. Many of these fields did not open employment to Saudi women before, and even if it hired women, many of the jobs offered were not socially acceptable for Saudi women to occupy because these jobs either involved mingling with men or constant travel, two actions women were restricted from doing. However, after the recent changes, Saudi women are considered as equally responsible as men in building the nation's economy and development. Their contribution is larger than before, and it matters more than ever before.

Feminist standpoint theory is enacted in this project by bringing in the female participants' perceptions first, then filtering out the male participants' perceptions through the female's perceptions. Although the participants are from the same society, the female participants are the ones considered on the margins since they are women, while the male participants are the dominant group. This project flips the standard power dynamics of society by emphasizing the Saudi women perspectives and making it the dominant, while providing the Saudi men perspectives as subordinate to those of the women. In other words, through the men's perceptions are filtered out through that of women. Some of the most important points to highlight about the standpoint of the English major Saudi women is that while studying the major, Saudi English female students experience the teaching of courses in a different way than

male students. Courses are taught with more strictness in the female section compared to the male section. A possible explanation of this is that female English instructors might be held to a higher standard of correctness and restriction in what they can do from their male centered administration, which reflects on the way they teach the language. Another point is that when both female and male participants were asked about the possibility of mixed classes, female participants showed more excitement and acceptances for this format of classes, which aligns with feminist standpoint theory that asks for challenging standard knowledge by focusing on the knowledge of women.

Finally, a very important point to stress here is that this dissertation captures a specific moment in time. Meaning that it captures the experiences of the Saudi female and male participants at a given period represented in the specific time of this research in 2020. Those participants' response reflected what was happening in that specific time and place, which might not be true today in 2022. Especially that Saudi Arabia is going through constant changes, and the Saudi women are getting more rights continuously. As a Saudi woman who was not there during the height of these changes, I feel excluded and outdated, as if I'm still in the same bubble I left with 10 years ago when I started my educational journey.

### **Dissertation Structure**

There are seven chapters in this dissertation; The Introduction (Chapter 1), Sex-separated and EFL instruction in Saudi Higher education (Chapter 2), Descriptions of the Study, Settings, and Participants (Chapter 3), Gendered Classroom Environment: Behaviors and Attitudes (Chapter 4), Perceptions of Mixed-Sex Classes (Chapter 5) The Possibilities of Translanguaging in the Saudi EFL Classrooms (Chapter 6), What is Next (Chapter 7).

The following is a brief overview of the chapters; Chapter 2 is the literature review for

the dissertation where topics like the history of teaching English in Saudi Arabia and translanguaging are explored. Then, chapter 3 discusses the details surrounding how and where the study took place, and who was involved in the study. Chapter 4 represent the first theme chapter where participants describe their experiences in the separated classrooms of the Academic Writing and Research course and reflect on what parts of the course needed improvement for the future. Chapter 5 represents the second the, me chapter where students reflect on their experiences in sex-separated classrooms and anticipate how their educational experiences would change if classes became mixed. Chapter 6 is the third theme chapter where participants are introduced to translanguaging and discuss how it takes place in their sex-separated classes and how they view it as a teaching method. Finally, chapter 7 is the conclusion chapter where a summary of the findings is discussed in relation to the research questions, and a section on the implications of this research for future research in Saudi higher education.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **SEX-SEPARATED AND EFL INSTRUCTION IN SAUDI HIGHER EDUCATION**

This chapter provides a review of the literature for the main topics covered in the current study. First major topic is related to education in Saudi Arabia and it starts with an analysis of the history of the English language instruction in the Saudi education, specifically the higher education. Then, a description of the methods of instructions used in the teaching of EFL. Followed by an explanation of the sex-separation in the public domain of Saudi Arabia, including that of higher education, with analysis of the idea of honor and shame. The section ends with a description of the Saudi Vision 2030 before it moves to the second major topic, translanguaging and multilingual writers. The chapter concludes with the discussion of translanguaging in the Saudi EFL classroom.

#### **History of the English Language Instruction in Saudi Higher Education**

The Saudi education system was founded with the establishment of the country in the beginning of the 20th century. Prior to that, according to Tariq Elyas & Michelle Picard (2010), there was a traditional way of learning that focused on learning Islam's holy book "the Qur'an" and the Islamic prophet's teachings, "Hadith"; this type of learning is called "the Qur'anic school." (p.137) After that period, at the beginning of the 20th century, formal education in the form of schools as we all know it, was introduced to Saudi Arabia. Now when moving to the beginning of teaching English in the country, many scholars had different opinions about when it actually started. For example, Christo Moskovsky & Michelle Picard (2018) reported that "English was first introduced as a school subject more widely in the 1930s with the discovery of oil" (p. 120), while Ahmar Mahboob & Tariq Elyas (2014) reported that English was first introduced in "the Scholarship Preparations School" in 1936 in Makkah that was open



to Saudis going to study abroad at the time (p.129). Khalid Al-Seghayer (2014) on the other hand, indicated that “it was believed” that English was “introduced into the Saudi Arabian educational system in 1928, a few years after the establishment of the Directorate of Education in 1923” (p.17).

No matter when English was introduced, what I think is important here is the reception of English teaching and learning in the country by many Saudis. English teaching and learning were not favored or supported by many Saudis when it started. As it's known that the majority of Saudis are Muslims and when English instruction started in the country many Saudis feared that it might change their identity or that it might affect their Islamic faith. Therefore, “there was a general reluctance to teach English or any other foreign languages” in the country (Elyas & Picard, 2010, p.139). This “reluctance” did not come from nothing, but actually many Muslim scholars in Saudi Arabia at the time, (and very much everywhere in the Islamic world) saw English learning and teaching as a gate into “Western, especially American, colonization, and the spread of Western secular thought” (Argungu 1996, as cited by Mahboob & Elyas, 2014, p131). These views of the English language, made some scholars call for “an Islamic approach to English teaching” in the form of designing a syllabus that would celebrate “the Islamic heritage” and “the great message of Islam” (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014, p132).

According to Al-Seghayer (2015), the English culture (I will call it English culture here to differentiate between it and the Saudi local culture) that is constituted of “Western values or the Anglo-American culture” was marginalized in the EFL classroom in Saudi Arabia. There was a belief that the English culture “will alienate [student] from their own cultural values.” Therefore, some called for “including ONLY Islamic and local cultural values in English textbooks.” (p.95) As time went by, this Islamic approach grounded its feet into the Saudi

English classroom because Islamic values were interwoven into the Saudi local culture. A paper that looked at the textbooks used in secondary school in Saudi Arabia concluded that the books respected the local culture of Saudi Arabia and it did not jeopardize its values or traditions and that these books “drew significantly on the local context, local culture, and local religion in developing their content and material” (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014, p. 141).

The question that can be raised after looking at a brief overview of the English language and teaching in Saudi Arabia is; Did the perception of many people about English stay the same? And my answer for this is; NO! This view of English being a “threat” to the Islamic religion and therefore to the Saudi values did not retain. After 9/11, Saudi Arabia was under scrutiny by the whole world, especially western media for reasons that don’t need to be mentioned here.

Alshahrani (2016) categorized the status of teaching and learning English in Saudi Arabia into two categories; one is before 9/11 and the second is after it. He acknowledged the era after 9/11 as bringing “a real shift” occurred in the teaching and learning of English because “the Saudi government has made massive efforts to promote English, which has resulted in tremendous development in the way in which English is taught, and its influence in the country.” (p.43) I think that part of this is related to the Saudi government realization that groups of radical Saudis have established a hatred stance towards western societies and so they needed a re-direction of their ideologies and beliefs to include other cultures who are the opposite of us. Another point here is to show the world that Saudis are separating themselves from an intolerant past that even reached the English language classroom. Also, as stated in Moskovsky & Picard (2018) and Elyas & Picard (2010) most western platforms criticized the Education in Saudi Arabia and the stance it fostered against English and the west to be the cause of what had happened; therefore, reform was a must. (Moskovsky & Picard 2018, p.80 and Elyas & Picard 2010, p.137)

## **Methods of Instruction in the Saudi EFL Classroom**

The reformation of the view of English teaching and learning was embodied in the form of multiple modifications to the beliefs that many teachers and students carried about the English language. Alshahrani (2016), underlined the significance of English teaching and learning as “not limited to its linguistic usefulness, but influences the social, economic, political, and religious spheres at the national and international levels as well” (p.45). Although this fresh perspective occurred in the beliefs of individuals, no real change has actually happened in the English pedagogy in the classroom. In Al-Seghayer’s (2015) article, he gave details about pedagogical approaches used in the Saudi EFL classroom until recently emphasizing that “the current traditional methods used to teach English in Saudi Arabia mostly follow audio-lingual and grammar-translation methods” (p.90) Douglas Brown (2007) states that while these two teaching methods differ in characteristics, they both share the quality of being part of “the history” of language teaching methods since they were established in the 19th century and mid 20th century sequentially (pp.19-23).

Al-Seghayer’s argument about the teaching of EFL in Saudi Arabia is supported by multiple authors who see a real problem in the way English instruction takes place in Saudi Arabia. Al-Nasser (2015) argued that educated Saudi students are unable to conduct a simple conversation or write a single sentence in English without it being flawed, even after years and years of English instruction. He refers to this as a reason “to raises many questions about the soundness of teachers and suitability of methods employed.” (p.1613). He specifically outlined that the problems in acquiring English as a second language in Saudi Arabia are; the late introduction of English instruction to students at an age where they might have built a sense of rejection towards learning the language, the untrained, unprepared language teachers, old-

fashioned curriculum, not using proper new technology in teaching English, using translation a lot in class, and “the fear of learning” that many students have that was initiated by intimidating classroom atmosphere (Al-Nasser, 2015, p. 1616).

From Al- Nasser’s specific points for the reduced English acquisition in the Saudi context, we see that not only outdated teaching methods are the problem, but also the undertrained teachers who are participating in the current deficiency of English teaching in Saudi Arabia. To add to this point, I want to go back to a paper that was published 16 years ago about the status of EFL preparation programs in Saudi Arabia. Al-Hazmi (2003) called for authorities in Saudi Arabia to “urgently improve its initial teacher and its professional development programs for EFL teachers their careers” which indicates that the problem of the Saudi EFL pedagogy stems from the way teachers teach the language (p.343). It’s important to mention here that Education in Saudi Arabia is centered, meaning that the Ministry of Education presents the top of the hierarchical education system in the country. As mentioned by Elyas & Picard (2010) English teachers work within that hierarchical system to preserve “national and/or religious identity frames the educational system, language practices, and pedagogy” (p.140). Besides the centrality of the education system, the English classroom is also centered, but in this case, it’s “teacher-centered” meaning that teachers take the role of the sole source of knowledge. As Elyas & Picard (2010) described it “The teacher imparts knowledge to the students, the students should, in the end, be convinced of the validity of the teacher’s knowledge and argument” (p.139)

I believe what made previous EFL teaching strategies prevail in Saudi Arabia are multiple reasons. First, the fact that Saudi Arabia is the cradle of Islam, or in other words, “the birthplace of Islam” where “two to three million pilgrims” come to the country every year “[to

visit] the revered holy cities of Madinah and Makkah” (Moskovsky & Picard, 2018, p.1). The need for Saudis to communicate with pilgrims who don’t speak Arabic increased the use of English education that depended on memorization. Second, Saudi Arabia is “the largest producer and exporter of oil in the world” and the early English instruction in the country arguably began with the discovery of oil (Moskovsky & Picard, 2018, p.1). Back then, the well-known English pedagogies that were carried out in the western ESL, specifically American, were the traditional ones; like the direct method (teaching using the target language only) and the audiolingual method (mimicry of the teacher). These methods transferred to the EFL classroom in Saudi Arabia without negotiating its effectiveness (Brown, 2007, 19-23). Third, the fact that education is centered in Saudi Arabia contributed to the delay in embracing modern EFL pedagogies. Suresh Canagarajah, (2006) argued that teachers in writing courses in the US don’t have to wait for the policymakers to implement multilingual pedagogical practices in the classroom, they can be change makers and start engaging in such practices. (p.587) However, in the Saudi context, there was a top-down system that controlled what can or can’t be practiced in the language classroom. This has made adopting new strategies challenging.

Finally, and this is important, Saudi Arabia had never been under Western colonialization as stated by (Moskovsky & Picard, 2018, p102). Yet, it seems that the outcome of colonialization, which is the spread of English as a form of dominance, has taken a huge space in the country’s development and progress, which subsequently contributed to “neo-colonial imposition of a global world order” this basically means maintaining the status of English in globalization (Moskovsky & Picard, 2018, p.80). This last point affected the EFL teaching strategies because it shows an increased interest among Saudi teachers and scholars in developing these strategies to meet the demand of this “global” language. Ofelia Garcia and

Angel Lin (2018b) wrote that “What we today call 'English' is thus a product of the complex historical and political contexts in which it was shaped, containing the voices and accents of diverse speakers” (p.79). The voices of Saudis were not among these “diverse speakers” that contributed to the shaping of English in the past, yet they are today.

However, on a different level, Al-Seghayer, (2015) explained that “in recognition of its increasingly significant importance, countries all over the globe have selected English as the first-rate foreign language to teach in their educational systems” While this being true, the fact that these countries were “forced” to include English because it is the language of the conqueror, and it was imposed on them is something that needs to be addressed here. Not only that, but globalization also comes, and brings with it the notion that Angel Lin & Peter Martin (2005) addressed, English as “an indispensable resource.” This term means that “English comes in a package” addressed to “many postcolonial people,” this package has “desirable goodies” these goodies include “English communication skills, information technology, business management and commercial know-how” which are used in the economic and technological development of these nations (p.3) So frankly, these respected people don’t have a choice, but to accept English as an important part of their educational systems.

With this in mind, the view of EFL has changed to include “the global” aspect of English being the language of science, technology, and economy. Since the introduction of “online education” into the language classroom in Saudi Arabia, the face of the language classroom changed to incorporate a larger platform for language learning and teaching such as; “massive open online courses” (Moskovsky & Picard, 2018, p.158-159). Plus, this revolutionary change in the language classroom facilitated another complexity that exists in the Saudi classroom; the sex-separated classroom. These massive online courses made the sex-separated classroom much

easier to teach because it facilitated the mixing of classes in the virtual world, so one instructor could to teach female and male students at the same time in one virtual class Some of the changes are actually happening in the quality and quantity of research done about the English classroom in Saudi Arabia. Although the EFL research in Saudi Arabia is still considered new, it has been noticed that there is a plethora of research in recent years. (Moskovsky & Picard, 2018, p.4)

### **Sex Separation in the Saudi Higher Education**

The Saudi culture is different from many Muslim cultures around the world in some traditions and values. One important point that highlights this difference is sex-separation. In Saudi Arabia sex-separation is common in many aspects of everyday life, including higher education. The reason for sex-separation in higher education is to prevent “Ikhtilat,” the mingling and mixing of the sexes while taking courses. The history behind the incorporation of sex separation in higher education goes back to the time when education was established in the country. According to Amani Hamdan (2005) it all started at the end of the 1950s, with King Faisal and his wife, Iffat Al Thunayan who were in support of women’s education and who in 1956 established the first girls school in Jeddah called “Dar Al Hanan, “The House of the Affection””. (p.49) Hamdan (2005) describes that Iffat Al Thunayan “transformed her wish that women be allowed to pursue science, language, and other subjects into a reality.” The establishment of this school in Jeddah, was followed by the establishment of “the first girls’ college in Riyadh called Kulliyyat Al Banat, or the Girls’ College.” (p.49)

As the first stone in Saudi female education, Nagat El-Sanabary (1994) states that “A General Presidency of Girls' Education (GPGE) was founded in 1959 and charged with the responsibility of establishing government girls' schools, the first of which was opened in 1960.

As an entity separate from the Ministry of Education, the GPGE was to guarantee its development in accordance with religious values and Saudi tradition.” (p. 143) These values and traditions mandated that female students go to separated schools. The notion of “Saudi girls travelling through the public streets every day to attend school” was intensely rejected by conservative Saudis. However, this did not prevent King Faisal from supporting women’s right in education. (p.49) Hamdan (2005) spoke about the struggle that King Faisal faced from conservatives after his rule of girls education, “[king Faisal] was not able to convince his public at the beginning. When he sent the official force to Buraydah [where many of the conservatives were] in 1963 to keep the girls’ school open, he did not force the parents to take their daughters to school, though he ruled that girls’ schooling be mandatory and obligatory, a ruling that continues to the present time.” (p.50) Many of the people against girls’ education believed that it goes Islamic teachings. However, “[King Faisal] saw a need to enlighten his people’s understanding of Islamic teachings regarding women’s education. Whenever [he] faced resistance he would ask, “Is there anything in the Holy Quran which forbids the education of women?” He further stated, “We have no cause for argument, God enjoins learning on every Muslim man and women”” (Lacey, 1981 as cited in Hamdan, 2005)

Obviously, the Saudi educational system has dramatically changed since then, but to get a better vision of the past, El-Sanabary (1994) described how the educational system in Saudi Arabia was from its establishment up until approximately the early 2000 writing,

Saudi Arabia has a dual system of education, one for males and the other for females. In that system, all top administrative positions, whether in the GPGE or the universities, are male. This vertical gender division, by no means peculiar to Saudi Arabia, is certainly stronger and much more institutionalized and legitimated there than in other Islamic or



non-Islamic countries. These top-ranking male administrators make all the major decisions affecting female education from primary schools to the universities. Although educated Saudi women are increasingly assuming a larger role in the educational system and filling positions of greater responsibility as school administrators, deans and heads of administrative units in the women's colleges, the power is held by men. (p.143)

As indicated earlier, the establishment of sex-separated education in Saudi Arabia was a response to the backlash from conservative Saudis, who believed girls education goes against Islam's teachings and Saudi society's values and traditions. I believe what fed the too strict protection that Arab men, including Saudis have over women is a result of the Arab strong attachment to the idea of honor and shame.<sup>7</sup> The Arabic culture feed the idea of women being a symbol of honor and shame in the minds of Arab men. This is related to what Alwedinani (2016) indicated as "social reputation," which she considers as one of the reasons for why many Saudi fathers reject the idea of mingling with the other sex. Alwedinani (2016) writes:

since Saudi society is a patriarchal society, a father's reputation is related to the reputation of his daughter, wife, sister or even his mother. Accordingly, if a woman commits an act that is socially unacceptable or contravenes Saudi customs and traditions, such as talking with unrelated men, it could tarnish the reputation of the woman, thus tarnishing the reputation of her father, brothers, uncles and tribe. (p. 88)

Although there has been an emphasis on the oppression of women in the Arab world and in this context Saudi Arabia, I do not think this is how many women were and are treated. Women in most Saudi families are treated with respect and dignity. This was and is still the experience of many Saudi females behind closed doors; however, it is understandable that some

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<sup>7</sup> Honor and shame is discussed in detail in chapter 5.

might argue against this opinion since the Saudi woman has not been granted many rights publicly until the year 2015. This is when the age of women empowerment began, and Saudi women started enjoying many rights publicly as a result of many reforms across the country.

I think one of the indicators for the inherited respect for women within Saudi society is the well-known expressions that honor women that I referred to in chapter 1. These expressions have transferred from one generation to another across tribes and regions. When a man wants to show his pride and honor, he would say “I’m the brother of (his sister’s name)” to show how much he is courageous and honorable just like his sister. Another well-known expression is “the daughter of men” or “the sister of men.” It refers to the strength, independence, and bravery of women. Now I understand how some feminists might take this as offensive or as rejected expressions, but I know for a fact that it is said in situations to honor women, not the other way around.

However, with that in mind, I cannot neglect the other dark side of the coin, where some families look at every action a woman makes as a symbol of her honor or shame, who doubt every move women make as the basis of the relationship between these women and their families is distrust. It’s important to note that this treatment of women is not common and is currently faced with strict laws and policies set by the government, so it is not tolerated as some might claim. In recent years, women’s rights in Saudi Arabia has witnessed remarkable progress after the enactment of laws that protect and guarantee their rights in various fields. One of the recent ones in 2021, Saudi adult women were granted the right to live independently from their family’s house if they wished, without the consent of anyone by themselves. Also, in 2022, reforms to the Saudi Personal Status Law were made to address “problems from which

families and women were suffering<sup>8</sup>” including, granting divorced women the legal guardianship of her children, the obligation of a husband to provide for his wife regardless of her wealth, setting marriage age to 18 and the ability of a woman to get married with or without the permission of her father.

It is apparent that the separation in higher education does not reflect reality anymore, the 2030 vision promotes the development of the Saudi economy by the active contribution and hard work of both men and women. Therefore, both sexes are more than likely going to work collaboratively to put valuable improvements of the country’s economy in action. It’s very likely that Saudi men and women are going to share workspace and work duties, so their interaction and communication are going to happen within the frame of professional setting and work. In light of all the recent changes in Saudi Arabia and since sex-mix is highly expected in future employment, is it far away from being implemented in the Saudi higher education? The sharp lines of separation that used to be in the country’s work force are drastically fading and both men and women are aspiring to be valuable contributors in their study and work fields. Not only are these lines becoming less apparent in the Saudi work field, but even in social life. Since the recent vast changes that occurred in the Saudi setting, many everyday activities in the country have become mixed-sex, like attending sports matches in stadiums and attending musical concerts. These activities excluded women in the past and only men were allowed to attend them, so is higher education in isolation from these everyday life activities?

### **The Saudi Vision 2030**

As discussed in chapter one, the Saudi Vision 2030 is the fuel behind many positive changes happening in Saudi Arabia. This revolutionary vision aims to have the Saudi economy

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<sup>8</sup> According to Alarabiya news.

relying by a high percentage on green power sources, and to decrease the country's reliance on oil. This vision has many pillars that need to be achieved in order for it to become a reality. One is targeting businesses by offering "stimulating opportunities for young men and women that can help them build their professional careers," so they could "contribute to the best of their abilities" to the Saudi economy. (The Saudi Vision 2030 website) The vision is achieved through the equal efforts of female and male Saudis, and by "unlocking the talent, potential, and dedication of [Saudi] young men and women." (The Saudi Vision 2030 website)

This research focuses on giving a voice to young Saudi students and Saudi women, and this is where the significance of the Saudi Vision 20230 comes. The vision statement particularly targeted young Saudis and Saudi women by stating that they will be provided with all the skills needed for them to thrive and contribute to the country's development. It indicates that "while many other countries are concerned with aging populations, more than half of the Saudi population is below the age of 25 years." This young population is considered a blessing, so they will be provided with "expanding entrepreneurship and enterprise opportunities." (The Saudi Vision 2030 website) Saudi women, on the other hand, are being praised for their high education, so their contribution to Saudi society and economy will be supported by "continue[ing] to develop their talents, invest in their productive capabilities and enable them to strengthen their future and contribute to the development of our society and economy." Mixed higher education and the possibility of using translanguaging as a new concept in the English language teaching classroom, both of which are highly possible to occur in higher education classrooms in the near future, in light of the recent changes occurring in Saudi Arabia and the aspirational Saudi vision 2030. The rapid and fascinating social and cultural changes in the country in the past five years were all connected to this vision, and still there are more changes to come.

## **Translanguaging and Multilingual Writers**

With this fast pace of cultural change in Saudi Arabia, it becomes possible for some aspects of education to change as well. One possibility for foreign language education is the acceptance of new strategies, such as translanguaging. As mentioned by Canagarajah (2012), “Translanguaging highlights two key concepts; First, communication transcends individual languages. Second, communication transcends words and involves diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances” (p.6); therefore, language in translanguaging does not mean a discreet and separate entity, rather it is a comprehensive and united system. Furthermore, translanguaging is defined by Ofelia García & Li Wei (2018a) as “the use of language as a dynamic repertoire and not as a system with socially and politically defined boundaries. With the focus on actual language use, translanguaging necessarily goes beyond the named languages” the idea of dynamic repertoire suggests that it is constantly moving or changing so it cannot be a fixed system (p.1). García & Wei (2018a) extended the conversation to include a description of translanguaging as the language practices of bilinguals and multilinguals in general, and the language use of students in bilingual and multilingual classrooms in specific.

García & Wei (2018a) signals that bilinguals/multilinguals have a larger language repertoire than monolinguals, and that in a monolingual language classroom bilinguals/multilinguals are being “stigmatized” by others as not good students as the monolinguals, which is not fair to them since they are being judged based on “half of their language” repertoire, not their full one. This judgment does not mean that bilinguals/multilinguals are linguistically or cognitively incompetent to convey meaning, this is merely a social judgment. (p.2). Hornberger & Link (2012) identify Garcia’s definition as an extension of Canagarajah’s definition because it expands “intermingling to include not just languages, but language varieties” (p.240). On the

same lines, Hornberger & Link (2012) offer an additional “broad” definition of translanguaging as “how bilingual students communicate and make meaning by drawing on and intermingling linguistic features from different languages” (p.240). An example of translanguaging would be writing a text using mixed linguistic features of a student’s language repertoire, like the essay that Canagarajah’s Saudi female student wrote in his class using her knowledge in the named languages Arabic, English, and French:

I consider the content part of Buthainah’s textual microecology. The theme of Buthainah’s essay—that she was motivated to become multilingual and multiliterate because she realized early on that knowledge is freedom—functions as a subtle way of preparing the reader for her bold linguistic and textual moves. She presents her thesis in the pivotal second paragraph: “Throughout my literacy development, the desire to know overpowered my other desires and gave me strength as new challenges and new perspectives arose as I design, learn, produce, and critically think” (D6). This idea is also neatly encapsulated in her epigraph, an Arabic proverb, *ومن يتهيَّب صُعود الجبال ~~~ يعيش أبد*, which she translates later as “Who fears climbing the mountains ~~~ Lives forever between the holes” (D6). She writes that her parents quoted this proverb to her when she was afraid to go to elementary school, and she returns to its theme throughout her essay. With this theme Buthainah seems to challenge the reader to also move beyond passive reading and negotiate her codemeshing. (Canagarajah, 2011a, p.405)

Another important point to note here is that the concept of translanguaging was initially derived from monolingual practices in everyday communication, and then it extended to multilingual education. In everyday communication, monolinguals use pointing gestures or explanatory language to clarify the meanings of their sentences. They break down complex

sentences or excessively interpret difficult language through methods like using simple words or descriptions. These methods made language experts envision how such methods might be used by multilingual learners when communicating in English. One obvious use is to mix a learner's native language with English to get the meaning across.

According to Elsa Auerbach (1993) questioning monolingual approaches in the English language classroom came this concept that challenged “the English only classroom” or the classroom that advocated using English in the language classroom as being “natural” and common sense ( p.14). The ideological power and authority over the other are established and persistent through language. This is present in the “British norms of usage and language teaching that have become the universal standard,” which resulted in the lack of development of “local solutions to pedagogical problems” (Auerbach, 1993, p.25). This is exactly what happened in the Saudi context, as well as other countries around the world, where British English and its language teaching methods were considered the default in English language instruction, with the adaptation of Islamic heritage in class content. The adaptation of British English was a result of the influence of British colonialism to surrounding gulf countries like Kuwait and Bahrain that were influencing Saudi Arabia. The monolingual principle came from the direct method that promotes the target language and eliminates the influence of students' first language. Bilingual/multilingual students in the monolingual English classroom become silent and shy, meaning that they don't participate in classroom activities and don't express themselves without feeling embarrassed since they don't have the competency of the so-called native speaker (Jim Cummins, 2009, p.320).

Moreover, translanguaging first existed in oral communication then it was extended to the English writing classroom. (Angela Creese & Adrian Blackledge, 2015, .p4) Many early

researchers emphasize that the monolingual or English-only approach in language teaching and learning is not paying off anymore. Multiple researchers like; Cummins (2007 & 2009), Auer (1999), and Auerbach (1993) all promoted the shift to a multilingual approach in language teaching because it celebrates the students' marginalized languages and makes their identities and experiences an important part of the language classroom.

### **Translanguaging in the Saudi EFL Classroom**

It is clear from all the above literature that the concept of translanguaging is relatively new in Western education; therefore, it is expected that its presence in the Arab context is barely there. As we all know, the Arab world has gone through massive changes as a result of the so-called "Arab Spring" in 2011 which stopped every aspect of life in many Arab countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria. Although most of the revolutions ended, the political and economic situations in many Arab countries are still unstable. I think this has affected the growth of research in English language teaching and learning, along with pedagogical practices. Therefore, I do not believe that the concept of translanguaging, as it is perceived in Western research, exists in the EFL classroom of the Arab world. Note here that I am not saying that the natural presence of translanguaging (that Garcia et al., refers to multiple times) does not exist in the Arab world, I am saying that pedagogical implications of the concept that are informed by theory and research are not there. On the contrary, Saudi Arabia has been safe and stable politically and economically speaking, but the field of translanguaging is very new, and probably many of the translanguaging practices and strategies have not been discussed in the Saudi EFL pedagogy.

Nevertheless, Hornberger & Link (2012) note that it's "neither simple nor easy" to establish pedagogical strategies that would incorporate translanguaging and work across classroom settings (p.242). With this view, they agree with Canagarajah (2011a) about the "long



way to go in developing a taxonomy of translanguaging strategies and theorizing these practices” (p.415). On the contrary to Hornberger & Link (2012) and Canagarajah (2011a), Garcia (2019) identifies three components of a translanguaging pedagogy “stance, design, and shifts”(p.165). Each of these components speaks to a certain part of the bilingual/multilingual classroom. The first deals with teachers having the “stance” that these students can be used as resources “to make meaning of academic tasks and learn.” This is the most difficult to obtain because it deals with the deep belief that language practices of students excel “the standardized named languages of schools.” The second deals with teachers “design[ing] units, lessons, instructions, and assessments that integrate home and school language practices.” The last one deals with teachers “shifting” their pedagogical plans to be “appropriate for moment - by - moment decisions teachers make to respond to learners' language” (p.165). García & Wei (2018a) points out to the use of translanguaging pedagogy with students “whose language repertoires differ from the accepted school norm.” Teachers use it either “to scaffold so that students understand what’s going on in the classroom, or “to transform” so that students can “represent their own individual identity not the identity assumed by the school” (p.4)

In a broader sense, I can imagine forms of translanguaging taking place naturally in most Arab EFL classrooms including the Saudi EFL classroom. I remember when I was in college doing my bachelor’s degree, I used to buy English literature books that have English on one side of the page, and the translation of it in Arabic on the opposite side. These editions of the books are called “dual language editions”. This fluid form of translanguaging was very popular among the girls in my classes. I remember feeling a sense of “accomplishment” whenever I finish reading a novel or a play in that form. I felt that I had already acquired a “native-like” fluency, which I know was not the case back then. My interpretation of why I felt this way is because I

was going through the assigned reading in English while understanding what it says because I have the Arabic translation right on the opposite page. I remember clearly that many of my instructors and professors discouraged students from using such books because they thought it will not help us learn English. However, in reality and as a student, those books actually worked well because they generated a feeling of accomplishment and progress in my mind. Reflecting back on using dual books by English majors like myself made me realize that it is actually a form of translanguaging because while students read in English, they can at any time peek at the Arabic text in front of them to help clarify meanings.

### **Codemeshing in the Saudi EFL Classroom**

Although translanguaging is barely present in the Saudi EFL classroom, the concept of codemeshing has more presence there. To differentiate the two, Canagarajah, (2011a) identifies codemeshing as “treat[ing] the languages as part of a single integrated system” whereas translanguaging “to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form [multilingual speakers] repertoire as an integrated system.” However, the most significant difference between the two is that codemeshing carries the possibility of “mixing communicative modes and diverse symbol systems (other than language), where translanguaging is only concerned with language. (p.401-403). The concept of codemeshing is similar to code switching; the difference is that the latter deals with the mixing of distinct and diverse languages and does not treat them as a part of a whole symbol system which is the job of codemeshing. Even better, Canagarajah (2006) addresses the definitions of codemeshing in academic writing as “a strategy for merging local varieties with Standard Written English in a move toward gradually pluralizing academic writing and developing multilingual competence for transnational relationships” (p.568).

A connection to the Saudi EFL classroom that I see is that most of the English used in the language classroom is based on standard British English, while most of the English used outside of the classroom (like in daily social interaction with foreigners) is usually colloquial American English. The connection with codemeshing is that many forms of “Americanized” arts have occurred in the Saudi public space, like the rise of Saudi hip-hop among youngsters. Canagarajah, (2011a) proposes four codemeshing strategies useful for English writing pedagogy, they are “recontextualization strategies, voice strategies, interactional strategies, and textualization strategies” (p. 404). Although Canagarajah, (2011a) addresses scholars and composition teachers in the US in his article, the idea of codemeshing presented is useful on a global level. Because if these practices of teaching English writing were professionally used elsewhere (other than predominately English-speaking countries), they will gradually take over the standard way of English writing in general. Plus, it will provide a plethora of tested and guaranteed pedagogical forms and approaches that could be useful to composition classrooms in the US, so it becomes less of a trial/error matter. What makes it interesting is the fact that these concepts overlap constantly. As a reader of Canagarajah, I think that he considers translanguaging a progression of codemeshing, but as a scholar it is complicated to differentiate the two in practice since they overlap.

### **Conclusion**

With the establishment of the pedagogical literature in the previous sections of this chapter, this dissertation moves to the study of focus. Highlighting the historical background that led to the current sex-separated classes that participant in this study experiences was necessary. The reader of the next chapters needs to be an informed reader who have acquired knowledge about EFL instruction in Saudi Arabia, and the translanguaging concept in order for them to

make necessary connections and embedded interpretations on their own. It is considered a necessary knowledge to understand the study.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **DESCRIPTIONS OF THE STUDY, SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS**

This chapter covers the hidden process that took place in conducting the research of this study. It focuses on a description of the department of Foreign Languages where the study took place, including explanation of the course that this research focuses on. Also, it lays out the procedures that I followed to recruit participants during the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020. The chapter then moves to describe how interviews were conducted, and who were the participant. Finally, the chapter ends with general observations that I noticed about how the interviews went.

#### **Description of the Department of Foreign Languages**

The Department of Foreign Languages is part of the College of Arts at Taif University. The name of the department might suggest that there are other languages being taught at the department, but as far as I know, the only language being taught there is English. As I mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, I'm an alumna of this department; the name of the department was the same back then with English being the only foreign language taught. Being an English major at this department means that you will take a variety of courses that cover different fields in the English language. There are courses in Literature, linguistics and translation, but the main focus of the department is on English literature. Looking back at the different courses offered, I think there is a large improvement in the diversity of classes offered in the department now compared to when I was a student. Obviously, there are several courses that have stayed the same, but there are more options now than there used to be. Also, I don't recall some courses being optional because all I remember being required to take all the courses offered to graduate. I also noticed is the online availability of all information any English major

would need, which is very professional and practical. Documents like general courses' syllabi, different forms for different academic procedures, and faculty information are all available on the department's page. The last observation I noticed is the increase of young Saudi instructors and professors in the department, which is slightly different from my time when I was taught by a higher population of non-Saudi instructors and professors.

## Study Plan

رمز المقرر	اسم المقرر باللغة العربية	اسم المقرر باللغة الإنجليزية	قسم المادة	الساعات المعتمدة	ساعات الاتصال	النشاط	نوع المقرر	المتطلب
104810-3	القواعد 1	Grammar 1	اللغات الأجنبية	3	4	نظري	إجباري	-
104811-3	القراءة 1	Reading 1	اللغات الأجنبية	3	4	نظري	إجباري	-
140812-3	الكتابة 1	Writing 1	اللغات الأجنبية	3	4	نظري	إجباري	-
104813-3	الاستماع والتحدث 1	Listening and Speaking 1	اللغات الأجنبية	3	4	نظري	إجباري	-
990311-2	المهارات الجامعية	University Study Skills	الدراسات المساندة	2	2	نظري	إجباري	-
990211-2	مهارات اللغة العربية	Arabic Language Skills	الدراسات المساندة	2	2	نظري	إجباري	-
104820-3	القواعد 2	Grammar 2	اللغات الأجنبية	3	4	نظري	إجباري	104810-3
104821-3	القراءة 2	Reading 2	اللغات الأجنبية	3	4	نظري	إجباري	104811-3
104822-3	الكتابة 2	Writing 2	اللغات الأجنبية	3	4	نظري	إجباري	104812-3
104823-3	الاستماع والتحدث 2	Listening and Speaking 2	اللغات الأجنبية	3	4	نظري	إجباري	104813-3
990111-2	أسس الثقافة الإسلامية	Principles of Islamic Culture	الدراسات المساندة	2	2	نظري	إجباري	-
990115-2	التاريخ والحضارة	History and Civilization	الدراسات المساندة	2	2	نظري	إجباري	-
104830-3	القواعد 3	Grammar 3	اللغات الأجنبية	3	4	نظري	إجباري	104820-3
104831-3	القراءة 3	Reading 3	اللغات الأجنبية	3	4	نظري	إجباري	104821-3
104832-3	الكتابة 3	Writing 3	اللغات الأجنبية	3	4	نظري	إجباري	104822-3
104833-3	الاستماع والتحدث 3	Listening and Speaking 3	اللغات الأجنبية	3	4	نظري	إجباري	104823-3
104834-2	بناء المفردات	Vocabulary Building	اللغات الأجنبية	2	2	نظري	إجباري	104821-3
990112-2	الثقافة الإسلامية (الأخلاق والقيم)	Islamic Culture (Morals and Values)	الدراسات المساندة	2	2	نظري	إجباري	-
104840-3	مقدمة في الترجمة التحريرية والشفوية	Introduction to Translation and Interpreting	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104832-3
104841-3	مقدمة في اللغويات	Introduction to Linguistics	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104830-3
104842-3	الكتابة لأغراض خاصة	Writing for Specific Purposes	اللغات الأجنبية	3	4	نظري	إجباري	104832-3
104843-3	تعلم اللغة الذاتي الموجه	Directed Independent Language Learning	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104834-2
104844-3	مقدمة في الأدب	Introduction to Literature	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104831-3
990511-2	مقرر عام اختياري 1	Elective 1	الدراسات المساندة	2	2	نظري	إجباري	-

Figure 1: The program of study for undergraduate English major students

## (Bachelor of English Language)

رمز المقرر	اسم المقرر باللغة العربية	اسم المقرر باللغة الإنجليزية	قسم المادة	الساعات المعتمدة	ساعات الاتصال	النظام	نوع المقرر	المطلوب
104850-3	الترجمة من الإنجليزية إلى العربية	Translation from English into Arabic	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104840-3
104851-3	المسوتات وعلم الأصوات	Phonetics and Phonology	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104841-3
104852-3	مقدمة في اللغويات التطبيقية	Introduction to Applied Linguistics	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104841-3
104853-2	ادب عصر النهضة	Renaissance Literature	اللغات الأجنبية	2	3	نظري	إجباري	104844-3
104854-2	الادب الكلاسيكي الجديد	Neoclassical Literature	اللغات الأجنبية	2	3	نظري	إجباري	104844-3
990512-2	مقرر علم اختياري 2	Elective II	الدراسات المساندة	2	2	نظري	إجباري	-
104860-3	الترجمة من العربية إلى الإنجليزية	Translation from Arabic into English	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104850-3
104861-3	المصرف	Morphology	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104841-3
104862-3	اكتساب اللغة	Language Acquisition	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104852-3
104863-2	الادب الرومانسي	Romantic Literature	اللغات الأجنبية	2	2	نظري	إجباري	104854-2
104864-2	الادب الفيكتوري	Victorian Literature	اللغات الأجنبية	2	2	نظري	إجباري	104854-2
104865-3	النقد الأدبي	Literary Criticism	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104844-3
990512-2	ثقافة الإسلاميه 3	Islamic Culture 3	الدراسات المساندة	2	2	نظري	إجباري	-
104870-2	تاريخ اللغة الإنجليزية	History of the English Language	اللغات الأجنبية	2	2	نظري	إجباري	104851-3
104871-3	النحو	Syntax	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104861-3
104872-2	مقرر تدريس للغة الإنجليزية	English Language Teaching Methods	اللغات الأجنبية	2	3	نظري	إجباري	104862-3
104873-3	الرواية الحديثة	Modern Fiction	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104863-2
104874-3	الشعر الحديث	Modern Poetry	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104864-2
104875-3	المسرح الحديث	Modern Drama	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104864-2
990114-2	ثقافة الإسلاميه 4	Islamic Culture 4	الدراسات المساندة	2	2	نظري	إجباري	-
104880-3	علم المعاني والتداولية	Semantics & Pragmatics	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104871-3
104881-3	علم اللغة الاجتماعي	Sociolinguistics	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104852-3
104882-3	البحث العلمي والكتابة الأكاديمية	Academic Research and Writing	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104842-3
104883-3	النظرية الأدبية والثقافية	Literary & Cultural Theory	اللغات الأجنبية	3	3	نظري	إجباري	104865-3
104884-2	تعلم اللغة والتقنية	Language Learning & Technology	اللغات الأجنبية	2	2	نظري	اختياري	104872-3
104885-2	علم اللغة النفسي	Psycholinguistics	اللغات الأجنبية	2	2	نظري	اختياري	104862-3
104886-2	تحليل الخطاب	Discourse Analysis	اللغات الأجنبية	2	2	نظري	اختياري	104852-3
104887-2	شكسبير	Shakespeare	اللغات الأجنبية	2	2	نظري	اختياري	104853-2
104888-2	أدياء نوبل	Nobel Laureates	اللغات الأجنبية	2	2	نظري	اختياري	104844-3
104889-2	الادب العالمي	World Literature	اللغات الأجنبية	2	2	نظري	اختياري	104844-3

Figure 2: The program of study for undergraduate English major students (continued)

As shown in figures 1 and 2<sup>9</sup>, English majors have a variety of courses to take in the department. Most are core courses, and a few are optional. One of the core courses for students in their 8<sup>th</sup> and final semester is a three-credit course called “Academic Research and Writing,” which is going to be at the center of this dissertation. In this course, the expectation from students is to practice writing in and reading about different parts of academic research such as literature review and research methodology. Also in this course, students should learn about how to search for and choose reliable sources, along with how to summarize and synthesize sources’ arguments. If I want to compare this course to a course taught in the US, it would be First-year College Composition. The course description as it appears on the course syllabi

<sup>9</sup> This screenshot is taken from the Department of Foreign Languages page on Taif University website. The document’s name is “Academic Advising Guide”

available online indicates that it focuses on “writing with heavy interaction with selected academic readings.” The main reason for this is “to familiarize [students] with key concepts in research and academic writing, types of research, research procedures, as well as data analysis and interpretation.” Plus, the syllabi add that “Students will be provided with specific writing practices in order to enable them to undertake the tasks involved in academic research and writing.” This all sounds very promising and optimistic, so are the students on the same page as what this syllabus promotes? Or do their experiences reflect a different view?

### **Recruiting Participants during the Outbreak of COVID-19**

As mentioned previously, this study uses semi-structured interviews with female and male participants. Using semi-structured interviews as the method for gathering participants’ responses is related to the phenomenological methodology used in this research. My goal for conducting semi-structured interviews was to receive as much authentic responses as possible from participants without the pressure of being scrutinized or criticized. I made sure to stress to participants that their participation in this project should improve English writing learning experiences for them and for future students, this should have granted them agency and authority over how they would like their higher education to become.

Although I had planned to collect written samples from participants, I only received a few of them. The samples I received were either too brief to be considered an assignment response, or unrelated to academic writing, or too perfect to review--meaning they didn’t look like accurate artifacts that would represent the participant’s experience in the English academic writing course. All the participants in this project are either current or former English major students at Taif University. They all took the same course, “Academic Research,” but not all shared the same instructor; however, it seems not many class materials nor activities changed



with the change of instructors. Besides students' participation, I received some input from an instructor at the department, who has taught the course to both female and male students before. These are used to bring more depth and context to the students' responses.

It is important to emphasize here that this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Cases of COVID-19 were increasing globally, but at the time I didn't think it would change the course of the research or impact the interviews. Therefore, after receiving approval from Taif University to conduct the research, I traveled to Saudi Arabia on a research trip to seek participants and start interviews. However, just two days after my arrival all educational levels were switched to online instruction for all students, faculty, and staff. Upon hearing that news, I was shocked and frustrated at the same time because I didn't know if I would be able to recruit participants or conduct interviews online. Part of my frustration was knowing how hard it would be for students to take my research seriously if there was not personal face-to-face communication with me first, which was the whole point of my travel. Also, I was worried that the uncertainty of the time and people trying to wrap their heads around the new normal that I might not be contacted by anyone. At the time, it seemed to me that students were struggling to finish the semester in the new form of instruction, so participating in a study that they have not heard about before in that suspicious time seemed unlikely.

However, I did everything in my power to get the announcement of my research to students. I contacted the chair of the department and the vice chair who was responsible for the female branch (female sections), and they put me in touch with the course instructors in both branches. I was then connected with students' leaders from each section, and through them the announcement reached the students. But to be honest, this was not the most helpful method,

especially with females. Only a couple of students contacted me, and the female instructor of the course was not as cooperative as I expected. It seems like she was dealing with the new instructional situation stressfully to the point that she did not want to add to her responsibilities communicating my research announcement to students. The most helpful method was through a friend I knew in the department, who got the announcement to current and recent graduated students. Ultimately, through word of mouth, I was contacted by several females who ended up participating in the study. In total, six females and five males participated in the study. This number is considered the average for phenomenological research like mine, where multiple interviews are needed to describe the phenomena in hand.

### **How Interviews were Conducted**

After two weeks of my arrival, I started doing interviews. Of course, I could not meet participants in person, but I tried to use every means of communication available to me to conduct interviews with those who showed interest in participating. The initial communication was done through email, but because I know my culture and I wasn't certain that they would reply back to me right away when I email them and because it's more convenient for both of us, I gave each participant my phone number to reach me at WhatsApp so we could talk about the details. On the app I first gave each participant a very brief summary of my research, then asked them if they wanted me to contact them so I can explain the research in detail, all of them agreed. Then, I asked if they had Skype. Only one participant said he did; every other participant had an app different from the other, with audio Facetime being the most popular. I asked if they preferred audio or video. Just one said yes to video; the rest refused and chose audio. I made these decisions because it was the best to do in that situation and I made sure to follow the UND IRB Guidance for Conducting Human Subjects Research Online

As I planned, I conducted interviews in Arabic, so the students were as comfortable talking to me as possible. Each interview took from 90 minutes to two hours, including the time for describing the study and obtaining informed consent. When I called them the first time, I stuck to the procedures explained by the IRB protocol for conducting interviews. First, I sent them the consent forms either via email or WhatsApp. Then I carefully explained every part notifying them of their rights and how signing the form if they agreed to participate protected their identity and information. After I obtained verbal consent from them to participate, most of them said that they either don't have a printer or can't sign the forms at that moment, so I asked them to do it as soon as possible and send them to me. I explained how I can't use any of the data unless I have the forms, they agreed, and we started; then, after just a few days of the interview, I received the signed consent forms. I printed it, signed it, scanned it, and then send it back to the participant. The interviews started in mid-March 2020 and lasted until mid-December 2020. In total, I did interviews with 6 female students and 5 male students, plus some insights from a male English professor who taught the same course for female and male students before. Four female participants took the course with female instructors, and the other two took the course with male instructors. All the male participants took the course with male instructors. Interview-based qualitative research that uses the lens of phenomenology like this study, aims for a smaller number of participants, to keep it focused on the phenomena and to get as many deep and rich perceptions of the participants as possible.

### **Who are the Participants?**

For the sake of granting privacy and maintaining confidentiality for participants in this research, it is obvious that they will be addressed with pseudonyms to hide their identity. The first names of female participants are organized according to the order in which they were

interviewed: Eman, Reem, Badriah, Abeer, Leena, and Sarah. The first names of male participants organized according to the order in which they were interviewed are Khaled, Abdelaziz, Mohammed, Faisal, and Ahmad. The participants' ages range from 21 to 23. Total of participants in the study is 11.

There are two pairs of female participants who shared the same female instructor. The first pair is Eman and Reem, who took the course with the same female instructor in the same semester, but both had different attitudes during the interview. Eman, who participated in the first and longest interview, was excited, expressive and clear, while Reem was calm and quite frank. I say she was calm because she was cooking her family's dinner while answering my questions! If you ask me, it was not an ideal timing, but when I asked to reschedule to a better time when she has free time, she said it's better for her to cook and answer me because she is concentrated. Reem was the only female participant who had experienced mixed-sex classes before during a summer visit to Malaysia, when she studied English for two months.

The other pair of female participants who shared the same female instructor in the same semester are Abeer and Leena. They took the course during the semester of Covid-19 outbreak, so they both experienced the shift to remote instruction in the pandemic. During the interview, Abeer was laughing in many of her responses in a sarcastic childish way. I believe it was a spontaneous response reflecting being nervous because she had said some brief and bold statements. I found myself clarifying some questions for her, and asking her to explain some of her responses. She paused a few times during the interview to think of a way to clarify those responses. However, Abeer shared interesting opinions throughout the interview. Leena, on the other hand, was calm and provided rich details. I felt her responses were precise, meaning she understood most questions and knew how to respond most of the time.

The last two female participants, Badriah and Sarah, took the course with different male instructors during different summers<sup>10</sup>. The instruction of such classes where the instructor is male and the students are females is usually done via a TV circuit. This is the most popular method for this class type, but it is not the only one used as more methods are gaining popularity. Badriah was beyond thrilled to be part of the interview and was the only participant who at the time of interview was working in a mixed-sex environment. She was excited to share her opinions and was detailed. At times she reframed the questions to clarify if she understood them correctly. This was helpful because I knew when she didn't get something. The last female participant, Sarah, took the class online with a male instructor in the middle of the pandemic. She was engaged and realistic in most of her responses, and she made sure to clarify her points whenever she thought I did not get them.

Switching to male participants, as I clarified earlier all of them took the course with male instructors. Three of the male participants, Khaled, Abdelaziz, and Mohammed, shared the same instructor in the same semester during the Covid-19 outbreak. Therefore, they have switched to online instruction like female participants who took the course during the pandemic. Khaled had a year's experience of mixed-sex classes when he studied English in the UK after high school. He was the calmest and perhaps the most discreet of all male participants. Most of his responses were brief, so I found myself asking him for either more context or further details throughout the interview. He was not as honest as I was hoping, because he hesitated in many of his responses. I know that many of my questions addressed sensitive topics for my culture; therefore, on top of being interviewed by a Saudi female, the sensitivity of

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<sup>10</sup> A class of this format where the instructor is male and the students are females can occur during any time of the academic year; however, it is very common during the summer to see multiple classes like this, as the number of instructors teaching is limited especially for the female section.

topics added to the decrease in honesty and directness of some male participants. Abdelaziz, on the other hand, began the interview with low honesty and evading questions, but ultimately his responses became more honest and rational. His interview did not begin well as we had to switch apps once to get the clearest audio. Plus, there was loud construction work happening closer to where he was, so it was annoying for almost half of the interview.

Mohammed, who was the only participant agreeing to a video interview, was very comfortable speaking to me even though it was through video. He shared that he has taken the course a few times before but failed it. I would describe his attitude in responding to my questions as honest and brief for most of the interview, but I sensed his reluctance to honestly answer a question or two even though he was very truthful answering other questions. The fourth male participant, Faisal, had a year and a half of experience studying English in the US, he was hoping to continue his undergraduate study in the US, but luck was not on his side for that. I noticed that he was a little nervous when asked some questions, but he had a unique perspective in a few of his responses. The last male participant, Ahmad, was very direct and critical in his responses. I noticed that he had the most traditional views among all the male participants.

### **General Observations from Interviews**

All the participants were excited for participating in the research, but I feel that responses from participants who had graduated or finished the course were more genuine. Part of this could be because they are a little relieved that they are done with the course, so anything they say would not cause them trouble even though I clarified that I do not have connections with the department. Overall, female participants were more outgoing and bolder than male participants. Even in their responses, they were not shy to express their thoughts or feelings

regarding any question I asked, while male participants were. I relate this to the fact that I am a female interviewing them, so they don't have a problem in communication with me, while male participants were a little more discreet. I anticipate that if females were interviewed by a male researcher, they would be more discreet in communication.

All female participants did not agree to have a video call but agreed to an audio call, which was expected, because most Saudi females do not feel comfortable showing their faces on camera to people they do not know well. Also, since many women cover their faces around foreign men<sup>11</sup>, this tradition imposes on women not to record videos or take pictures of other women when they are in an all-women place. The rejection of conducting interviews through video by female participants made sense to me because they do not know me on a personal level, and because the interviews were recorded. What was not expected is the male participants' rejection to do the interviews through video; only 1 out of the 5 male participants agreed to be interviewed via video call. My explanation for this is an invisible communication barrier that was created naturally between Saudi men and women because of the space separation they experience in daily life. Speaking to a non-relative Saudi female is an action that does not happen spontaneously by Saudi males, and the same goes for Saudi females. Therefore, when adding visual communication, the intensity of the communication barrier becomes higher. Although personally I experience a form of this communication barrier when speaking to Saudi men, I have taught myself to consciously overcome it for specific situations, including conducting the interviews with male students for this project.

Due to the global pandemic, meeting participants face-to-face was impossible. And since all participants but one did not agree to a video interview, I was unable to observe their body

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<sup>11</sup> By foreign men here I mean men who are not part of the women's first-degree relatives or the second-degree relatives, except cousins who are considered foreign men.

language or facial expressions to accurately verify the trustworthiness of their responses. However, through carefully listening to the interviews while analyzing them and with the help of my filed-notes, I was able to figure out many of the reactions, expressions, and feelings each participant was having during the time of the interview.

Finally, the descriptions of the interviews with female and male participants are discussed in the following three chapters; Gendered classroom environment: behaviors and attitudes, perceptions of mixed-sex classes, and the possibilities of translanguaging in Saudi EFL classrooms.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **GENDERED CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT: BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES**

#### **Chapter Introduction**

This chapter covers phenomenological descriptions for the Academic English Writing and Research course in the separated classes of female and male participants through their eyes. The topics covered in the chapter are based on responses of participants explaining their personal experiences and observations. Commentary on participants' inputs is based on analytical interpretations and assumptions to provide the reader clarity on participants' lived experience, given the fact that I'm familiar with the culture and environment. At the beginning, I must clarify that the responses of both the female or male students participating focus on their separate branch of the department and not the opposite sex branch. For example, when a female participant says the instructor or the students or the class, she is referring to a female instructor or female students or an all-female class. If anything falls outside this common rule for this chapter, then it should be clarified accordingly.

Participants are grouped in the analysis of the data and in the presentation of the data according to shared characteristics that they have in common with each other such as, taking the same course or having similar perceptions about a certain point. Their perceptions and experiences of the course are compared and contrasted throughout this chapter. I provide analytical interpretations and reflections based on my understanding of the participants' explained experiences and the Saudi culture and based on the interviews' field notes.

All the students interviewed for this project, were either finished taking the Academic Research and Writing course or were taking it at the time of the interview. For this reason, the difference in individual experience is visible. However, there were several shared comments

across experiences that resulted in clear and direct observations about the collective experience of the phenomenon of studying in an English writing course in a foreign context. In other words, although participants' responses are unique to their individual lived experiences, some of their responses were shared by other participants. Through connecting these shared experiences, the phenomenon of studying in an English writing course in a foreign context is given meaning. This shared and varied experiences construct the phenomenon of learning English writing in a foreign context.

Overall, Female participants were eager to share their opinions, as if it was a chance given to them on a golden platter. Most female participants were detailed in their descriptions of the class, and they were precise about what to criticize in the class. For example, responses from female participants who took the class with female instructors highlighted being overwhelmed in the class for a number of reasons, such as the instructor's not giving the course the time and attention it needs, or introducing new materials to students every class meeting without giving them time to process old materials, or having to work in groups with reckless students, or not having complete freedom choosing topics for the class's research project.

The chapter is mainly structured around the idea of engagement. The themes covered in this chapter are; engagement with instructor, engagement with materials, language practice, and improving the course's experience for future Students. Each theme begins with the female students' perceptions as the main focus of the analysis, while the male students' perceptions are filtered out through the female students' perceptions. This is demonstrated through providing male participants' responses that supported or contrasted with specific responses I gathered from female participants. These male responses are provided to illustrate the similarities and differences in female and male perspectives. Finally, the chapter concludes with the essence of

the phenomenon for studying an English writing course in a foreign context.

## **Engagement with Instructors**

### **Classroom structure**

The first female participant, Eman, was in her final semester at the time of the interview. Her experience highlights how the course was not given the attention or time it needed. When asked to describe the class, she was direct in mentioning the downsides by explaining how the instructor was busy with duties outside of the class. As a result, “classes were canceled very often” and the instructor was assigning “worksheets for [students] to do through Blackboard for next class meeting,” even when students did not have a clear vision on what to do with it. Eman explained the surrounding circumstances through her own experience, “class time was in the afternoon, and we had an evening class after it, so most of us did not leave campus, and we were hanging out doing nothing waiting for that other class.” What Eman described here is typical and familiar to many Saudi females who attend college.

Eman’s perspective of the class is not necessarily shared by everyone in the same class. Reem, who graduated before the interview, took the academic research course with the same instructor as Eman; however, what she highlighted about the class was not the instructor being busy and cancelling class often, it was the class being “very boring to the point where [she] counts minutes.” When Reem was asked to specify what was exactly boring, she replied “the content of class.” Reem thought that the instructor repeated herself a lot saying “[students] felt ideas were clear, so no need to repeat it over and over again, just say your idea and leave, you don't need two hours, the idea is clear!” Reem’s description of the class as “boring” is an indication that perhaps nothing new was presented in class, and the instructor did not engage the students in the materials being taught because she was not fully prepared due to her other

duties. Instead of engaging students with new active class content, the instructor emphasized content the students already know.

Instructors' repetition is an observation noticed by many students all over the world, but repetition is an ancient learning mechanism that has been proven to be effective. As mentioned in Weibell (2011), Aristotle referred to "frequent repetition" in the context of learning as "[producing] a natural tendency. The more frequently two things are experienced together, the more likely it will be that the experience of recall of one will stimulate the recall of the other." When this concept is applied to the teaching of language, the more certain language aspects are taught repeatedly, the more language acquisition occurs. What makes this language acquisition happen is not only the teaching methods used to teach certain language aspects, but it is the body language, expressions, and little comments that accompanies that teaching strategy.

With that being said, I understand where Reem's frustration is coming from because the repetition that her instructor seemed to adopt is what Weibell (2011) described as "the redundant drill and practice." (p.17) Repetition needs to be more than that, it needs to establish patterns of familiarity that a learner can recognize in any given context. Weibell (2011) said, "as we recognize these patterns we are able to respond to them in systematic and automatic ways, refining and improving our response over time. Recognition comes by way of repeated exposure to the pattern." (p.344) In a language class, this recognition would ultimately lead to language acquisition. In Reem's situation, these patterns of familiarity were absent due to lack of active guided practice in class, as she shared, teaching methods were mostly traditional and teacher-centered. However, "the nature of practice" in learning "should be hands-on, of good quality, and guided by instruction" which are missing characteristics of Reem's class. (Aristotle & Burnet, 1913 as read by Weibell, 2011, p.25)

The role of instructors in providing an effective classroom environment was mentioned in a study conducted by Choudhary Javid (2018) at the English Language Center at Taif University. This study focused on students' learning autonomy and concluded that female and male "EFL teachers are no longer providers of knowledge only, rather they have to act as learning resource, facilitators and counselors." Also, the study suggested "pair/group work and classroom activities" as one of the methods to promote learning among students. (p.321) Although this study was based in an English learning center that serves students pursuing different majors, its results are applicable to those English non-native speaker students who are on the verge of graduating with an English degree.

What seems to be a large point of agreement between Eman and Reem regarding class environment, is the lack of class activities. Eman shared her feeling of unfairness when it came to the quality of class, saying "[the instructor] didn't clarify everything for [students] in a way where I can write anything in the future and be fluent in it. I feel like we were treated unfairly!" Eman explained further "when we ask students from other schools, they say the course is fun." She commented on her experience and the experience of other students in the class as the opposite of that, saying "we didn't receive what we deserve in this course and I don't want to be unfair to the instructor, but we did not get much information." Hearing this from Eman, I thought that maybe the students' large number is the issue here, but Eman said there were "20 to 25 students, not a lot." Usually, the expectation from an instructor in a class with a moderate number of students like this is to give the class enough attention. Meaning, with a class number like this, an instructor is expected to give their full attention to the class by attending class regularly, preparing materials for class, making educational alternatives available when class is not in session, grading students' work frequently, and providing students with constructive

feedback to improve their educational experience.

Switching to other class experiences in the female branch, Abeer and Leena took the same class with the same female instructor during the pandemic. Because of the pandemic, both participants confirmed that the instructor had taken some new measures that changed her original plan for the course assignments' structure. One of these was switching the final paper from an individual assignment to a group assignment. This is an interesting choice to make since students are not meeting in-person, but I guess the instructor predicted that students would communicate through social media apps like WhatsApp and they would be committed to it.

Abeer spoke about her class experience as requiring students' focus all the time because the instructor did not give them a chance to be distracted. The instructor constantly took them off guard by calling their names and surprising them with questions related to the class content. Students did not have other choice but to focus in class. Abeer indicated that this technique is the reason why the instructor usually takes the whole class time because it takes time to constantly stop the lecture and ask students questions. Abeer said "[the instructor] explains points in detail, then ask us to repeat what she said," so I asked Abeer if the class made her feel bored. She replied "yes, but it's good that it turned to online instruction," which is an indication that the online format of the class is less boring. With this in mind, Abeer described her instructor as "flexible and passionate about teaching" and that "she wants [students] to understand the class and puts their benefit first."

The other student from class Leena, agreed that the instructor was trying her best to not complicate things for students and that she was "an impressive teacher." Leena enjoyed the class and described it as "fun" even though she preferred it to be face-to-face, which is not the same preference as Abeer. Also, Leena agreed with Abeer that the instructor's technique of

calling on students was intimidating, saying “[students] suffered from in-class activities and from the instructor asking questions that [they] must answer,” adding “sometimes we don't know the answer because we don't have prior knowledge on what is being asked.” In the same manner, Abeer emphasized the lack of class discussion, which according to her was limited to responding to students’ questions about the content. This was confirmed by Leena saying that “class was mostly lecturing” where the instructor explains a certain idea like "summary" then shows them examples for it, and finally asks them to apply what they learned in an assignment they turn in for the following class meeting.

It is interesting to see if the male participants who took the course during the pandemic, experienced the class in the same way that Leena and Abeer did. It was clear that Leena and Abeer took similar and different stands from the class environment, but what about male participants who shared the class during the pandemic? Were their experiences similar or different? Khaled, Abdelaziz, and Mohammed are three male participants who took the course during the shift to online instruction because of the COVID-19 pandemic. All three were in the same section of the course. Khaled shared that the instructor had a sudden circumstance that prevented him from teaching the rest of classes during the time of the interview, which was supported by Abdelaziz and Mohammed. Whether there was a substitute instructor to the class or not is something that I cannot confirm. Because of the instructor’s special circumstances, Khaled was clear in indicating that he doesn't have valid experience in the academic research and writing course. However, his classmate Abdelaziz, indicated that there is nothing special about the class and that “it’s like any other English class.” Abdelaziz mentioned that the instructor did not do writing with them at the time of the interview, even though the class is about writing. That is why he was not sure about the number of written assignments assigned to

them in the course but said that “most instructors give 4 to 5 assignments in a course.”

According to Abdelaziz, the instructor was not available outside of class and was only available in class, which was frustrating for him when he had questions to ask but cannot email the instructor or access him outside of class. Abdelaziz claimed that even though he sent emails to the instructor, he did not receive a reply. With that being said, Abdelaziz seemed to be a fan of how students depend on themselves to write and “do [their] own research”, and how they have the chance to be expressive in what they want to write. Plus, how the class “doesn’t require memorization and [knowing] many unique terms” to write. Overall, it seemed that Abeer and Lenna’s female instructor was more attentive and engaging than the male instructor teaching Khaled, Abdelaziz and Mohammed, even though it was during the pandemic and it was a new situation for everyone.

When I inquired about the weekly class instruction, all three participants did not recall specific class activities, but mentioned that they had class discussions with the professor. This is very similar to what Abeer and Leena experienced in their female section. Mohammed described the interaction with the course instructor as “he explains, and we listen and focus with him. Sometimes he asks us questions and we answer him” adding, “we don't have intensive discussions, but if we have a question, we can ask the instructor.” I assumed from Mohammed’s response that the instructor is the main authority in class, so I asked him how tolerant the instructor is of students’ inputs in class, and he responded, “the man is humble” adding “he is a humble human to the degree where he gives and takes.” Mohammed clarified his answer here, saying that students’ communication with the instructor is good; he hears what they say and respect it, even if they told him that his explanation of materials is bad, so in that way he is humble. A sign of the instructor’s flexibility with students is shown using Arabic in class when



necessary. Mohammed mentioned that the instructor uses English mostly when speaking to them in class; however, when he finds students puzzled by something he said, he would either say it in Arabic or translate a word or two to Arabic. It is clear that during the pandemic, the male students who took the course received more flexibility and tolerance in the class than the female students.

The last female pair I interviewed, Badriah and Sarah, are unlike the previous female pairs. They are “the odd pair” because they took the class with two different male instructors during two different summer semesters. Badriah indicated that it was a three-credit course that met twice a week, and during class “[the male instructor] comes live on video and can only hear [female students].” She described the class as “a fun class full of information,” but because of the class’s short time due to it occurring during the summer and the holy month of Ramadan<sup>12</sup>, they were focusing only on “general headings” so time was not enough for “digging deep in course materials.” Badriah indicated that they were communicating with the male instructor via email most of the time, “beginning by sending him individual short tasks, then sending longer papers.”

Sarah, on the other hand, described the class as “a two-hour class” wherein the first hour, the male instructor brings in materials from outside of the curriculum or the course books and explains it to the students. In the second hour, he uses the course book and explains things from it. Sarah expressed that the instructor didn’t share with them that this is his teaching method, but she and other students noticed that this was his approach teaching the course. However, Sarah’s information about the number of the courses’ credits was incorrect. The course is 3 credits according to the university website. However, Sarah’s instructor might have

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<sup>12</sup> Ramadan is a holy month for Muslims, and it is a time when the majority of Muslims fast from sun dawn to sun dusk for the length of 30 days.

not taken the whole class time, which resulted in her misinformation.

The last two male participants, Faisal and Ahmed had already graduated at the time of the interview. They took the course with two different instructors. These responses of these two male participants are different from the female responses and from the responses of the previous three male participants because they are short and do not really give lively expressions about the class environment. On one hand, Faisal described the class he was in as “simple, but lacks major points for academic research” and when I asked how, he replied, “[the class] doesn’t teach how to do a research paper from the start.” More specifically, Faisal indicated that the instructor did not teach them how to begin writing about a topic, and that he wished if there was another simplified course preceding this to teach students the basics of academic writing. On the other hand, when Ahmed was asked about the nature of the course, he said, that it focused on how to establish research in an academic way, how to find credible and valid sources, and how to write and organize essays academically. This response by Ahmed reflects the ideal instruction that would be given in a course like this, which makes me doubt if he was actually reflecting on the actual class he was in, or responding with a perfect answer for the question I asked.

These responses by Faisal and Ahmed represent a general observation about the course, meaning that male perceptions do not provide detailed and rich descriptions unlike the perceptions of females. This happened probably because these male students were being interviewed by a female and so the social barrier that exists between the Saudi men and women naturally appear, and it pushes them to be brief and quick in their responses. Or it happened because the power dynamics in the relationship between these male students and their male instructors are not as powerful as they are between the female students and their female or male

instructors. Meaning that the male students might be not feeling the powerful authority of their instructors as intensely as the female students feel in their classes. Or it could simply be that these male students are not doing as well as the female students in their courses and so they do not have as much to comment on.

### **The communication with the instructor**

It seems that many participants indicated the lack of communication and engagement between the instructor and the students. This is very important to focus on because it will most likely lead to a deficiency in the development of students' second language acquisition. Second language development is described by Atkinson et al., (2007) as “engagement and participation in a dynamic and changing mind-body-world continuum.” (p.170) This means that acquiring a second language will not happen unless the learner is engaged with internal and external motivators that promote effective learning. The two types of motivation internal and extrinsic motivation is defined by Brown (2007) as “a continuum of possibilities of intensity of feeling or drive, ranging from deeply internal, self-generated rewards to strong, externally administrated rewards from beyond oneself.” (p.88) In the inquiry of what type of motivation is superior between the two, it has been clearly established by Brown (2007) that internal motivation wins, since “we will strive for self-esteem and fulfillment” regardless of the presence of external motivation or reward. However, Brown (2007) explains that only one type of extrinsic motivation can positively impact intrinsic motivation or maintain it and that is “positive feedback.” Brown (2007) refers to the positive feedback that learners receive in a classroom as “a validation of [learners'] own personal autonomy, critical thinking ability, and self-fulfillment,” and that it works as “a boost to their feelings of competence and self-determination.” (p.89)

In Eman's situation, the instructor, who represents the external motivator for students to learn writing, seems careless and unengaged with students; therefore, their learning of the language and writing was not successful; as she said, "the instructor had no time to focus and see our accomplishments." The relationship between instructors and students needs to be guided by mutual respect because "a teacher's classroom behaviour could also affect learners' motivation; thus, teachers should create a class environment of trust and respect with pupils." (Alison & Halliwell, 2002, as cited in Al harthi, 2016, p. 382) Even if the students in this study are assumed to be beyond the development of a second language, in reality they are not. They are still in the phase of second language acquisition, which is evident in a number of research studies indicating observed problems in the English-major Saudi student different language skills, especially in English writing. One of these is Alhaysony (2012) who closely analyzed the writing of a group of English-major female students looking for errors in the use of articles in their writing.

I asked Eman whether their opinions are appreciated in class or whether their voices are heard as students. She replied, "our instructor is great outside class, but when you deal with her as a student, she takes it personally, if she doesn't like something we do or say, she skips it or say "no, I don't like this" or "we didn't do this"<sup>13</sup>" so maybe if you ask other students who took the course with other instructors, maybe you'll find something different." Moreover, I asked Eman if this experience of rejecting their opinions is repeated in other classes, she said "no, there are other classes where I can say my opinion freely, I can discuss with the instructor and it does not get personal, we respect each other's opinions." Eman described a specific incident where she was in another course and the students were discussing something with the instructor

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<sup>13</sup> Indicating here the instructor's recall of her own experience when she was a student.

who seemed to have a different opinion from them. Eman explained how she and other students benefited from the conversation because they did not feel the instructor was strongly rejecting their opinions, nor viewing them as less educated, but rather objectively considering their opinions as “merely different”. I sensed from Eman that the discussion with the other instructor was done in Arabic, so perhaps this contributed to Eman’s positive view of the discussion with that instructor. Eman confirmed that speaking Arabic in the academic research course was not an option.

The approach that some instructors take in not giving students freedom to express their thoughts or opinions in the class, is disappointing. It pushes students away from learning in a social group. According to Rebecca Oxford (1997), John Dewey, the famous American philosopher and psychologist, who happened to be very influential in education, viewed learning as a social experience and that “learners do not learn in isolation,” but rather “by being part of the surrounding community and the world as a whole.” Also, Oxford (1997) adds that “In Dewey’s view, disciplined reflective inquiry promoted by a community of learners (i.e., the knowledge community) helps create meaning among seemingly unstable events.” (p.447) In Eman’s and the other participants’ case, “The knowledge community” is the instructor and the other students in class, so imagine how much learning these students are missing out in these classes due to minimum social interaction.

Similarly, Oxford (1997) illustrates another psychologist’s view about learning that occurs in social interaction. Lev Vygotsky, referred to an individual’s cognitive system as “a result of communication in social groups and cannot be separated from social life.” Oxford writes “For Vygotsky, the teacher acts as a facilitator or guide and the provider of assistance.” Therefore, in this Vygotskian light, a teacher’s helping role in a second language learning might

be “a hint or clue, a word of praise, a suggestion, a learning strategy, a grammar reminder, or an intensive review—anything that the particular L2 student needs at a given time.” (p.448) I add to this list, allowing learners to communicate in their first language whenever needed.

When students want to express something in Arabic, they should be given this chance. In fact, communication in the students’ first language is a must sometimes. Mohamed Abdel Magid & Abdelrahim Mugaddam (2013) indicate that “in classrooms where both students and teachers share the same L1, there is a great tendency for using it in the fields of explaining meaning and difficult words, guiding interpretation, transmitting lesson content, illustrating grammatical rules, organizing ESL classrooms and praising and encouraging students.” (p. 31) Therefore, avoiding or preventing students from speaking their first language in a class that teaches English is not guaranteed nor logical. Abdel Magid & Mugaddam (2013) extend the conversation further, arguing “the exclusive use of English in the class could perhaps minimize the effectiveness of students’ learning of the language. Consequently, L1 use in EFL classrooms should not be discouraged; rather, it should be allowed to help students in learning a foreign language.” (p.39)

When asked about the presence of discussion in class, Reem says “there is some discussion, but [the instructor] mostly explains how research was done more than discusses it”; she clarified that the instructor is the most dominant and the one who speaks the most in class. Then when Reem was asked about the nature of class activities, she mentioned that it was nonexistent because “it was mostly lecturing!” as indicated by Eman earlier. When it came to grading, Eman claimed that the first assignments is the only assignment that she got back graded from the instructor, as the instructor was not keeping students posted with grades. “We didn't know how she evaluated our assignments because we only had the grades of the first

assignment, not the second or the third. We submitted assignments on Blackboard, but didn't know our grades.” Not receiving grades back was frustrating for Eman, as I can imagine that if I were in her shoes I would be frustrated too. According to what Eman shared, students seem to be turning assignments on time, but the instructor seemed to be late in grading them and sending it back to students. Eman claimed that she only got one assignment back in the duration of the whole semester. Some research indicates that late grading negatively influences students’ language learning and it deprives students from discussing feedback with teachers. Javid (2018) stressed the importance of teachers giving students “timely feedback” because it is essential in promoting students’ learning autonomy. Getting graded assignments back faster, gives students a chance to “discuss feedback on their language tasks, assignments or projects as well” with their teachers, which students were deprived of in Eman’s case. (pp. 318-321).

On a different note, Reem reported that the instructor was not strict in forcing students to use academic language in their writing but focused on “the use of important words.” Besides that, Reem indicated that “paper structure, word count, and plagiarism” were the most important points the instructor focused on. Reem frankly said, “we were around 20 students in class, so in the end she will not be able to read all of our research.” This could be true, considering the previously indicated fact that this instructor was not giving the course her full attention most of the time.

Although some research argues that Saudi students have weak motivation to learn English and experience a number of language communication issues, other research has indicated that it is not just the students’ fault. Oqab Alrashidi & Huy Phan (2015) write that “when students make drafts or revise their own works, they are usually left alone without any guidelines from the teacher ... teachers commonly do not follow up with their students’ work to

see whether they have improved or not, which can hamper students' English academic development." (Khan, 2011, as cited in Alrashidi & Phan, 2015, p. 39) Additionally, "the English teacher is an important factor that accounts for students' lack of motivation and competence development" because "they do not provide students with example from real-life situations when explaining, do not encourage or praise students' participation and ideas, tend to correct students' mistakes immediately, and provide constant criticism regarding their learning attempts." (Al-Johani, 2009, as cited in Alrashidi & Phan, 2015, p. 39)

When it came to the positive and negative observations about the way the instructor handled the class that Abeer and Leena shared, Abeer saw the length of class time as a disadvantage of class because it was "too long" saying "the instructor did not waste a minute of class time without teaching." This is related to the lack of communication between the instructor and students. Leena agreed with Abeer on that point, saying that the pressure they feel when the instructor takes the whole class time is negatively influencing their learning and it should change. From what Abeer and Leena shared, it seems that they would have preferred "hands-on" activities, or activities that get them engaged in the new material they learn. Leena indicated that the course is "more verbal than group work or anything else," adding the "instructor comes to class and asks so many questions and waits for our answers, I recall research work should not be like this." Again, this is all related to the lack of communication between the instructor and the students. Another disadvantage of class from Abeer's perspective is what she referred to as "the overlapping of information due to the instructor's lack of organization." Although Abeer felt her instructor was dedicated in teaching, she indicated that the instructor confused them because she constantly switched the conversation from one topic to another, like "switching from citation to summary to paraphrase."



Leena thought saw tough grading as a negative point about class saying; “We worked hard, but still lost many points.” Leena claimed that the instructor was unfair to them in the way she graded their assignments because they didn't get what they deserve as students. Leena indicated that even after reviewing their drafts with the instructor, “they still were penalized”. When I asked how they reviewed it with the instructor, she indicated that their instructor gave them feedback via email. Leena recommended that the focus on writing mistakes while grading their papers should change, especially that they're undergraduates and they cannot get to the instructor level who has a Ph.D. Not only was evaluating their assignments unfair, but Lenna claimed that assessing their responses when being asked questions in class was unfair because they were asked about “things [they] didn't know” and their inability to respond “affected [their] grades.” Also, Leena referred to the pressure of work the instructor assign to them on a weekly basis as a downside of class saying; “the number of assignments and quizzes that we have to turn in is very stressful we cannot handle it.” Another form of pressure Leena mentioned is the pressure to take the whole class time, which she felt should change.

Two male participants who confirmed the lecturing in the male section were Faisal and Ahmed. Faisal said that the course depended on lecturing and reading or translating handouts to students, so there was no engagement in class. Faisal explained that when he turned in paper assignments feeling that he did “good writing,” his papers didn't get the grades he was hoping for because they were “expressive writing” rather than academic writing. However, Faisal indicated that he didn't know what the instructor wanted, saying that “[the instructor] didn't tell us don't write expressive writing.” When I reviewed the course syllabus available online, I didn't read that the course limit students from using expressive writing. However, it clearly states that “this course focuses on writing with heavy interaction with selected academic

readings.” Which is the reason for Faisal’s rejection for expressive writing. Faisal thought the instructor “was not capable of teaching the course since [students] don't understand how to do research and find sources well.” However, Faisal made sure to mention that not all instructors are like that because he had taken courses with instructors who knew what they were teaching very well and were very skilled.

Moreover, Ahmed indicated that the instructions they received from the instructor were not always “specific,” but they were used as a guide to direct them in the right direction. Apparently, this direction was the course’s book, as Ahamed revealed that the instructor depended on the book for explanation and examples. The instructor seemed to be utilizing traditional teaching methods where the class depends solely on the instructor lecturing students and using the book as the main source of information. However, the instructor’s reliance on traditional methods could not be his fault independently because Ahmed referred that the class didn’t use technology and the room was not equipped with technology either, the reason for depending on traditional methods could be simply due to the lack of technological equipment in the room.

The responses by Faisal and Ahmed confirm how a male’s perspective about the course is more general and doesn’t focus on details about the interaction with the instructor. This is evident when comparing the responses of the female students who were taught by a male instructor to the responses of male students like Faisal and Ahmed. In Badriah’ s class, who was taught by a male instructor, she confirmed that the instructor’s teaching method was mostly “lecturing,” with no in-class activities and “no interchanging interaction.” Which is the same as the other female participants. This proves that even if the instructor is male, there is still a lack of proper communication between the instructor and the female students. Meaning that there

was a problem in the interaction with the instructor who was the main source of knowledge and authority in class. Badriah indicated “[students] were supposed to discuss what [they] did for research in class, but because time was short, it never happened”. When asked about the advantages of her class, Badriah said it was helpful that “at the end of each class, we were asked if we have any questions or concerns, and at the beginning of next class, the instructor does a quick review of the previous class.”

However, when Badriah was asked about the disadvantages, she mentioned the time spent to finish the class, explaining, “this course needs practice, so I prefer to take it with a female instructor whom I can go to during office hours to discuss”; then, she emphasized that if she had to retake the course, she would take it with “any instructor” but only face to face. This notice by Badriah is very important because as a writing a class that needs active work, it makes sense to have it only in a face-to-face format. Not all of Badriah’s experience was brief because she said that they have talked about plagiarism in class, but the issue with it is that they didn’t cover everything they supposed to because it was a summer class.

Another female student who was also taught by a male instructor is Sarah. She saw that “having freedom to pick topics” and the lack of “quizzes or a midterm exam” as a very positive point that indicates good communication with the instructor. However, when she was asked about improving points in the class that she would like to see, she referred to the instructor explaining things from outside of the syllabus “materials that are irrelevant to the syllabus” as something that needed to change. Additionally, Sarah referred that when the instructor explains points from the book, he uses his understanding of those points rather than sticking exactly to what the book says. Sarah wished that the instructor identified specific points from the book as important rather than reading everything in the book and leaving them to identify what is

important and what is not important. Sarah seems to be confused about the books' language, because she wants the instructor to explain each sentence mentioned in the book. She was hard to understand at times because she contradicted herself continuously and had many unclear responses.

An interesting point that Sarah mentioned in improving the class is that some female students refuse to participate using "audio communication" during class; therefore, the only form of communication with the instructor during class is through chat. Sarah wished they could reply to the instructor using audio communication, but since some students refuse it, they don't use it. The remote instruction was a switch for Sarah's section after COVID-19. I don't know what program is used for communication with the instructor, but I don't think that the student's behavior in refusing audio communication is weird because I see a few explanations behind it. First, is as simple as not feeling comfortable to speak online. Second, is to save themselves the embarrassment of making mistakes while speaking in English, especially with the intimidation of speaking through a device that many EFL speakers have. The third and least common reason is the ideology that some people have about how a woman's voice should not be heard by foreign men because of its sacredness. This ideology was very common in the past among people because it was believed to be related to the teachings of Islam which is something that has been proven not quite accurate in recent years. Having said that, I highly doubt that this last reason is what the female students believed in because this ideology has dropped in popularity in the recent years.

With that in mind, technology assisted teaching methods is the best solution to ease the Saudi female student's interaction with male instructors. Maggie Saba (2013) confirms that "Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)" is the best in meeting "the special needs of

the Saudi students who feel uncomfortable working with the opposite sex. Blogging and working in groups digitally allows them to relax and work together, while at the same time respecting their traditions.” Therefore, there is no doubt that CALL would be the best solution for female students who hesitate to communicate with a male instructor. (p.232)

The need to improve and update educational methods used to teach students was mentioned by Khaled saying, “students don't understand through explanation only” but they need “some clues.” Students need more helpful educational methods in place of the outdated and traditional. Methods that depend on pictures or videos need to be incorporated into the teaching of the class. What Khaled’s classmate Abdelaziz did not like about the course was not the outdated educational methods, but rather the lack of knowledge he had as a college student to conduct a research paper saying, “as a college student I don’t have much information to support my research.”

The lack of using technology while teaching the course was also indicated by Ahmed. According to him, technology has a known benefit of delivering information easier and quicker. Ahmad is accurate in saying that technology facilitates learning because no doubt in that; however, the use of technology in the classroom has proven to be more than a learning facilitator. Technology use in the classroom has expanded to include multiple purposes, one of which is closing the gap between students and faculty with different genders. Talal Alasmari (2020) discusses the use of mobile learning technology in closing the gender gap happening in Saudi institutes. Alasmari (2020) calls for implementing mobile learning technology in the Saudi educational system because he considers it “a means of bridging the everlasting gap of gender separation, especially in schools.” (p.656)

Going back to the communication with the instructor, Mohammed argued that the

instructor is the one who determines whether a class is good or not because he is the key for students' performance and their comprehension of the class. Therefore, any positive or negative experience in the class stems from the instructor's cooperation with the students. Mohammed indicated that this applies to his class where he thought the instructor is wonderful and he felt good about the class. Then, when asking Mohammed about the disadvantages of the class, he started comparing it to online instruction, and how a face-to-face class is less convenient because you spend time and money to be physically in class. Yet, he thought that positive outcomes of a face-to-face class outweigh negative ones. "Seeing the instructor's expressions, gets the information delivered quicker to students. In online instruction, I can be distracted by anything."

Mohammed's input here highlights a distinct difference between female and male students. As a male he likes the convenience of online instruction because it is probably just easier to access class from anywhere. The same applies for female students here, but from a female standpoint, this convenience include more than just accessing class from anywhere, it includes the convenience of not having to get ready at all because as a female, you are not expected to turn your cameras on during online meetings. It is socially preferred for a Saudi woman not to show her face in online spaces, it is sort of like a social custom. When checking the profiles of Saudi women on many online spaces, like LinkedIn or Twitter, it is noticed that many of these profiles do not include personal or professional photos of these women as it is very normal and socially common.

Going back to the teaching methods used in class, Mohammed suggested that instructors "need to explain things in Arabic 90% of the time." According to him, this teaching method, should improve the outcome of the course since it is taught to Arab students. Since students still

need to know how to pronounce English words, Mohammed suggested that instructors read and write materials in English, but they need to translate and explain those materials to students in Arabic, clarifying, “some students know English, but their comprehension of it is slow.”

Mohammed felt that even if students know English or are interested in the language, it doesn't mean that they can understand it efficiently; therefore, explaining materials in Arabic makes it easier to comprehend and delivers the information better to students. Also, Mohammed realized that in reality, “nobody has the courage telling instructors to explain things in Arabic,” yet instructors need to be aware that “it's rare to have students with full comprehension in both languages.”

Mohammed reflected on this himself, saying, “I'm one of the students who becomes very tired during English explanation and teaching. Yes, I don't always understand, but sometimes, if I'm tired and in class, I just can't wait until the class finishes.” What Mohammed meant here is that when he attends class while he is exhausted, he does not need to hear English on top of his exhaustion. This could be a valid reason for how the use of Arabic in teaching the class could be justified. This method can probably be appreciated in the male section but will probably face intense backlash in the female section. As mentioned earlier, Eman indicated the refusal of her instructor using Arabic in the class, where she was under pressure to speak in English even though she didn't know how to express the idea in English. A male student, Faisal referred that in his class “no explanations of materials existed, just translation.” This is an indication that using Arabic in the male section was already taking place, a privilege the female students don't seem to have.

### **Collaboration between the students**

Although this was not a point mentioned by the majority of participants, but some

referred to the support or lack of it that they saw from their peers in the class. When Eman was asked about the advantages of the class, she replied “collaboration between us, students, we helped explain things to each other when needed which was helpful.” When Reem was asked the same question, she replied “no advantages! It was mostly a boring class,” but she did admit to the supportive environment she found among other students. They helped answer each other’s questions and helped each other in forming ideas. This cooperative environment helped both Eman and Reem to deal with some of the shortcomings that occurred because of the instructor’s lack of engagement with students in the course.

When I asked Sarah about the specific class activities they did during the week, she said “nothing” adding “[the instructor] explains things to us while we listen and take notes.” After the class, Sarah referred to how the female students help each other through the chatting app WhatsApp<sup>14</sup> by explaining things to each other. This is an indication that the instructor was not the main source of help nor support especially for the female students. Sarah shared part of her experience as an English major saying, “honestly in my major I don’t rely on the instructor’s instructions or teaching, but on my understanding of the materials and the book assigned.” Sarah justified this answer saying, “sometimes instructors give wrong answers” and it confuses her, so she needs to have something like the book to rely on, and she viewed it as more beneficial than the instructor. Also, Badriah who was taught by a male instructor, referred to the support she found from other students when she compared the content that she took with the content that they took, and found out that many important points were discarded because the time they had to finish the course was very limited.

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<sup>14</sup> Students usually communicate with each other and with their instructor through the popular chatting app WhatsApp. It is popular and common method that students create a chatting group for a course section every semester, where they can exchange information and clarify materials to each other, it is more popular than using emails. Sometimes the instructor is added to the chat, sometimes not.



In a different class, Leena liked the cooperative nature of assignments, so she liked doing assignments in groups, not individually, because to her “research writing is long, exhausting, and boring,” so when working in a group that makes the process a lot of fun and exciting.” As a female working collaboratively means thinking about the team’s ultimate goal which is fulfilling the need behind the collaboration, in this case getting a high grade. This collaborative approach in writing assignments was new to Leena since it seems that was embedded after the COND-19 pandemic. Leena wished that it would continue even after the pandemic because she benefited from it, which is not shared by her classmate Abeer, who thought that if she worked “individually” she would have “benefitted [from the course] more.” Since the support system for Leena was provided by her classmates and not the instructor means that these female students can successfully work in the least supportive environments, which proves that they have a power that cannot be underestimated. The fact that no male participant mentioned this collaborative nature as an observation from their male classes, proves that females can work with any challenges they face and proves that this power dynamic does not exist in the male section.

### **Engagement with Materials**

#### **Course assignments**

Beyond the instructor’s weak class engagement, when asked about the type of writing activities done in class, Eman said “none;” however, she mentioned that they were given exercises, then were divided into groups, and were encouraged to do the exercises and evaluate each other’s work outside of class. “She didn't have time, so she asked us to do it ourselves.” The only real and rare class activity that Eman remembered is when the instructor prepared a power point slide show and discussed it with them. Emphasizing Eman’s point about the

structure of assignments in the same class of the course, Reem spoke about how students were divided into group and encouraged to work together outside of the class on the individual assignments “[the instructor] explains parts of the writing to us first, then group us and gives us instructions on the assignment, so we can do it outside of class in a week or two.” Reem referred to how the course was different from any other course she took before because the writing and activities were different and challenging. “The writing is academic, but was hard, reading research and writing about it was new and very hard.”

Reem saw that the difficulty of English academic writing as one of the negative points about the course generally indicating “the language itself was difficult for [students], we weren't at a stage where we can write research yet.” This has made Reem to recall her first year being English major, “most of us were immediately learning literature, I wish we have had English language instruction before the major's courses, most of us would have benefited from them.” Describing her feelings at the time, Reem said “we were feeling frustrated, depressed and more.” Then, she goes back to the academic research course saying that it was above their language proficiency level even though the papers they had to write were not lengthy, “4 to 6 pages long.” Reem then justified her and other's humble performance in the class saying, “maybe if we were given enough time, we might have got it.” Reem indicated that maybe if they were asked to write “a half page every week,” maybe they could have grasped it, which is a reference to the drafting process they lacked that most writing goes through. Also, she referenced that the lack of active writing in class whether individually or in groups just added fuel to fire.

Similar to what Reem experienced, Saba's study (2013) involved a Saudi female participant whose writing practices were influenced by the assumption of “outside authorities”

judgment, she writes:

That assumption is solidified by her previous literacy practices, which did not incorporate revisions and depended on only one single draft. As a result, she believed that she ought to perfect her first draft, missing the purpose of writing several drafts; therefore, she fell victim to her worries about making mistakes (Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 79). As a female trained to follow her collective culture's authority, which defines actions in dualistic terms, right and wrong, when writing Fadia [Saba's female participant] carries with her the message that her culture is the source of authority, and tries to meet its expectations. Cultural training that put her under constant supervision and scrutiny has led her to believe that she needs to be perfect. That sense of perfection got extended to the way she approaches writing. She feels that whatever she writes has to be perfect, even at early stages. (p.176)

These observations about writing practices from the experience of females in my research and the female in Saba's research indicate that females are under the pressure of being judged as inadequate learners just because they write in a way that challenges standards methods of writing.

Switching to another female section of the course, Abeer indicated that the amount of information covered in her section of the course was large "the class is long and heavy because [the instructor] wants to teach everything." Most of the activities used in class is related to "asking students questions or handing them worksheets or information sheets related to the content of class." Abeer explained that sometimes the instructor showed them examples from articles for certain writing techniques they learn about in class, like paraphrase which is confirmed by her classmate Leena. Abeer distinguished the English writing in this course as

different than the writing she was taught in previous writing-focused courses. “it’s more detailed and bigger,” meaning more intense. Moreover, Abeer reported that the class informed students of the different writing techniques, like summarizing or paraphrasing, but it did not give them a chance to practice it. So, most of the knowledge they were getting was theoretical more than practical. They worked on assignments which they turned in for grading, but there was not much active work in class or online other than a few moments. This lack of writing activities is something shared across classes and instructors based on the participants responses. Abeer’s justification for the small number of in-class active activities was “the switch to online instruction,” so they couldn’t do much writing activities.

One of the few moments for an in-class activity was described by Abeer as enjoyable. It was a successful in-class activity that she liked and learned from. This experience of an in-class activity was engraved in her mind because the instructor was actively engaging them in the teaching process. It was related to in-text citation. Abeer mentioned how her instructor focused on citation to the point that she memorized it like her name “before this class I had no clue what citation means” then added “in text citation was great and I’ll never forget it.” Abeer explained in detail how her instructor showed them an example of an in-text citation, then showed them how to create it, eventually she says they were asked to try and create one which was something they all enjoyed and learned from.

More active and practical experiences like Abeer’s should exist in the English courses at the department, especially in a course that teaches English academic writing. No English writing class would be successful without the active and persistent writing activities and assignments. whether done individually, in pairs, or in groups. Abeer experience was confirmed by her classmate Leena indicating that what they learned about plagiarism and citation was

engraved in her memory. One of the assignments that Leena mentioned the instructor gave them was summarizing articles about different topics like “corona virus or ESL challenges.” Those assignments were not done in class; the instructor showed them how to do a summary and then asked them to do summaries of different articles as assignments. In-class activities that focused on free writing like writing reflections were not part of the section Abeer and Leena shared, nor part of any course section of the participants.

Abeer indicated earlier in the chapter, that the instructor constantly switched topics with new ones during the class, with that switch in conversation comes new materials since according to Abeer “nothing is repeated in class, everything is new.” For the students, it was hard to keep up with all the new materials. Abeer referenced how she and other students were overwhelmed by the amount of new content taught to them. It seems that in every class meeting, students were taught new materials with no prior knowledge, and they were not given enough time to absorb the new materials before switching to something newer.

In another class, Badriah talked about some of the grounds they covered in class saying “[students] were taught how to write summaries about sources and how to use a writing style, but we didn't learn writing a literature review since there was not enough time; we only took main ideas and applied them for the course and did a short 5-page version of the final paper.” But in another section, Sarah indicated that the type of writing they did in her class was “pure academic writing” and that they try to understand and apply writing styles like MLA. This means that they have covered these styles in class. She indicated that the instructor focused on writing practice more than anything else, saying “it's practice more than testing because until now we did not take any tests or quizzes or midterms, the instructor focuses on research which I think is better for our education.” Not having quizzes or exams is a relief to Sarah, who says, “it

is all assignments that the instructor evaluates, and it is great because that way I can focus on what I have in mind instead of thinking about exam grades.” Sarah elaborated how exams are not practical because if she had an exam and she did not study for any reason, the bad grade she gets is not a reflection of her learning, but if she worked on a research paper all semester long that would show her improvement.

Since Sarah mentioned that the instructor focuses on writing practice, I had to ask her if he provides them a chance to practice writing in class, or to actively write in class. She indicated that he doesn’t make them practice writing in class, but instead explains writing to them from the book, saying, “he uses the book, a chapter or a half chapter; he shows us examples on how to write.” Therefore, what Sarah seems to like about the course is not how they are actively writing in class because this did not occur, but rather how the class does not make them busy with exams or quizzes. The exclusion of exams could be a change in class structure happening because of the switch to online instruction due to the pandemic, since other female students who took the course in the past indicated that there was an exam given at the end of the semester.

Sarah indicated that the instructor explains main points about writing assignments to them in class, then they write those assignments and send it to him for feedback. She said that this happens with every part of the research paper, like the introduction or the body. They write that specific part, send it to the instructor for feedback, revise it according to the feedback, and then move on to the next part until they are done with the whole research paper. So, they break down the writing assignment or the research paper into pieces where they work on a piece for a week or so, then move on to the next and keep doing this until they are done with the whole paper. From what Sarah described, it seems like the research paper is not evaluated as a full

assignment, but each part of the paper is associated with a specific percentage used towards the course grade. Sarah explained how they started with writing the outline, which is an assignment they wrote over a week or so, then moved to writing the introduction, then the body, and finally the conclusion. After the process of writing each part, they send it to the instructor for feedback via email, so they need to show him their writing of every part of the paper along the way, instead of showing him multiple full drafts. At the end, Sarah mentioned sending the full research paper to the instructor “a week before the finals,” and if he approves it, they can submit it to Blackboard.

Just from Sarah’s description of her summer class experience, I can see many female students wanting to be enrolled in summer sections. Since many summer classes are taught by male instructors, these classes are more flexible, concise, and convenient. From the descriptions of female participants, a female student in a male-taught summer class is probably relieved from needing to maintain the high expectations that female instructors expect from them. However, whether in a summer semester or not, this course does not seem to have proper writing practice for students due to the absence of hands-on class activities and in-class active writing workshops. Both male female participants did not mention writing workshops in their descriptions of their course sections.

Writing workshops that focus on drafting, peer reviewing, revising, and editing are essential to improving students’ writing skill. As Carol Rinnert and Hiroe Kobayashi (2001), referred, the more students get training in English writing, the more they understand how English writing works, and the more they start adhering to the English writing features. Rinnert and Kobayashi, (2001) study on the perception of EFL writing, reveals that “with more L2 writing experience, Japanese readers' perceptions of English compositions seem to change

gradually from preferring L1 writing features to preferring many of those of L2 writing.”

(p.202) An example from the study mentioned how English writing aim to persuade readers; therefore, “readers would expect to be given specific evidence directly related to the writer's point,” a concept that seems to be grasped by non-native speakers with more writing experience. (p.202) Therefore, in-class active writing workshops not only make Saudi students get used to English writing, but also help them comprehend linguistic features of English writing. Brigid Burke and Haylee Holbrook (2018), state that through writing workshops, “students can learn that excellent writing involves peer review, editing, revising, and re-editing,” which means that writing is not a product, but rather a process. (p.43)

### **Freedom in research topic choice**

From what participants shared about the course so far, it seemed that the course did not have a specific theme to operate on. Therefore, it makes sense to allow the students to search for and write about any topic they are interested in, but this was not always the case, according to the participants. Eman mentioned that her instructor was picky when it came to research topic choice; she recalled her own experience where she had showed the instructor 30 topic choices before she could say yes to one of them. Eman confirmed “if [the instructor] does not like a student’s research topic, she will not approve it and might take this matter personally.” Eman continues, “I know a student who picked a topic that the instructor did not like, so as a result she lost many points, and the instructor was frank about it, saying, “I told you I don’t like this topic from the start,” which was unfair to the student.” Also, Eman mentioned that on top of this everyone’s topic needs to be unique, meaning that nobody else in the class is writing about it, and for an individual assignment like this, it is very hard to accomplish. “Some girls could not pick a research topic for two months because they did not know what to write about.”



The approach this instructor followed in the research topic choices is problematic because there is an assumption here that the students already know what to write, how to write it, and what everyone in class else is writing about, even though apparently they are struggling. For writing the papers, Eman described that the instructor asked students to use APA writing style in their papers, and that they were not allowed to convey any personal opinions in writing, that it needed to be “the opinions of others.” Eman genuinely clarified “I don't want to be unfair to the instructor, but we did not get much information from the class; most of the information was old and just got clarified a little like, how we should avoid plagiarism.” Eman declared “freedom in choosing topics” as one of the negative points in her experience in the course saying, “if you like the topic, you will accomplish something and be very happy while looking for sources and working on it, but you will not accomplish anything if forced to write about a topic that you are not interested in.”

I could not find an explanation for these actions by the instructor, so I looked into what the other students in class said about this issue. Reem contradicted Eman's story, saying that there was no a problem in topic choices, and that students can write about any topic they wish and that, they instructor only told [students] you will not find sources for some topics, but she did not reject any topics or students expressing their personal opinions in the writing. Although Reem stood by her version of the story regarding research topic choices, I find it hard to believe her in this part. Mainly because she later admitted that she did not write her research paper herself, but got the help of someone to write it for her, which brings us to a whole other topic of plagiarism and how students are taught to avoid it, but their writing is not inspected for it. Also, Reem declared how there were not any advantages for the class because she was mostly bored by it, which is an indication that she did not pay close attention to what was going on in class.

Abeer expressed frustration about her inability to write about topics she wants because her instructor asks them to only write in the field of the English language. This is confirmed by Leena, who indicated that they were asked to “pick five topics in the field of English or Linguistics preferably;” then, the instructor would pick the easiest one for them to write. Abeer shares that whether she writes about something related to linguistics or translation, her instructor doesn’t mind as long as it’s in the English field. However, the instructor greatly minds writing about any other topic. Abeer wants to write about the recent accomplishments of Saudi Arabia, saying “it’s a negative thing not being able to pick my own research topic” and that “for four years, since I started my study, I wanted to write about the accomplishments of Saudi Arabia, especially after the 2030 vision, but every time instructors reject this idea, I don’t know why.” She continues saying “the instructor of the academic research wanted me to write in the field of English studies. It’s not my job to write about English studies, there is no freedom in research topic choice.”

I assume Abeer’s feeling that she is not qualified to write in the field of English studies stems from either her view of herself as an undergraduate and a non-native English speaker student, or her view of herself as someone who shouldn’t be expected to have solid knowledge in the language. After all, college is her first experience of solid and constant English instruction. I suspect her feeling that writing in the field of English shouldn’t be expected of her is related to the fact that many female English majors choose the major because of the prestigious status it brings to them. Let’s not forget that up until recently, it was one of the few majors widely accepted for females to major in. Of course, this has changed dramatically in the past five or six years, where many more females are majoring in different fields, but I think that still there might be very few families who have a limited list of fields (suitable) for females.

Abeer explained further how this strategy of restricting them to write in a certain field made students write about “similar or repeated topics like semantics or syntax.” She mentioned that “not everyone has the same level of passion or specialty” in the topics they are allowed to write about. Also, Abeer referred to her instructor telling them that “APA is important in the class,” so I’m assuming that she wants them to use APA citation style. But I wonder whether the students were taught documentation styles in the class. Besides, Abeer mentioned that the instructor asked them to write as a group assignment “a research paper without the abstract or the results discussion.” She specifically said, “[instructor] asked us to write an introduction, literature review, methodology, conclusion, and references” and this is used for the final assignment of the course.

I find this writing structure interesting because the first thing that comes to mind is what are the students supposed to write in the conclusion of their papers. So, I think it would have worked better if students were asked to write one part of the research paper for their final assignment instead of doing an incomplete and uncoherent research paper. It would have helped also to assign less students for every group for the final project because as Abeer referred for the final assignment, the whole class was divided into two large groups, and the instructor gave each group two topic choices to choose one and write on it. Abeer’s explanation for this is that the instructor did not want to have “too many papers to grade,” especially with the uncertainties that came with the beginning of COVID-19.

Badriah, who took the class with a male instructor, shared a different experience when it came to choosing topics. She said that their instructor gave them freedom in picking research topics, and he only rejected “general or repeated research topics.” This is interesting to learn, and I wonder if the timing in which the class took place had anything to do with granting

female students' freedom to write in any topic they wish. The same was experienced by Sarah, who also took the course with a male instructor. She referred to the instructor as the one who evaluates if a topic is too general or specific, but he still gives them total freedom in picking the topics they want. The process is each female student brings five topic choices, then the instructor chooses one of them for the student, and that way he tells the student if the topic is general or specific. The experiences of Badriah and Sarah with the freedom in picking topics is quite different from the other female students interviewed who took the course with female instructors. This tells a lot about how flexible male instructors are.

The conversation about whether to let second language learners write about topics they like or not is not new. Several researchers discussed this topic, one of which is Joshua Bonzo (2008) who proved that when language learners are given the freedom to choose the topics for their writing assignments, their writing fluency and complexity seems to increase compared to the writing done in topics chosen by their instructors. (pp.729-730) Moreover, Bonzo (2008) suggested that "writers in intermediate language classrooms should be given a degree of freedom regarding the topics they write about," and that instructors should implement more instructional tools that allow language learners to have that freedom. (p.732)

The experience of male students with research topic freedom is very different from most of the female students. Khaled indicated that generally in the courses he takes, when doing a research paper, students are free to choose the topic they want to write about for their research. However, he indicated that the themes of courses they take, including the academic research course, are generally related to education or technology. He shared that these types of topics do not interest them as a young generation and that "with time change, everything needs to change." Despite the unexciting course topics, Khaled shared that when it came to class

discussions, students were allowed to “share opinions in discussions freely,” so it was not a right exclusive to the instructor, but everyone in class shared it emphasizing, “everyone participated and read in class.”

Khaled’s classmate Abdelaziz agreed about the writing freedom they were given as students course. As Khaled indicated their writing freedom is within the limits of the research topic that an instructor put for them saying, “the instructor gives us the research topic and tell us write about this or that. However, you have freedom to discuss the topic as long as you don't go far from the main topic.” To clarify what Abdelaziz said here, I gave him an example of a course that has the overall topic of technology and told him that as long as he writes about something related to technology, he is going to be on the safe side; then, asked if this situation mirrored their courses, and he confirmed that it did. With that being said, Abdelaziz shared his preference of having “absolute freedom” when it comes to topic picking because “this way [he] can pick a topic [he] is knowledgeable in and can write good research [as a result].” Another solution that he thought would work, is to change the overall course topic to something all English majors are knowledgeable in: “literature.” Abdelaziz explained this saying, “for example if I am knowledgeable in literary subjects, then I would prefer that the academic research course be about literary subjects, so I would be familiar with the subject and can do a good research paper.”

In another academic research and writing course, Faisal indicated that they had complete freedom in choosing the topics they want to write about, and that students were interested about writing about gaming topics, not topics related to the English major. Faisal indicated that their opinions as students in the class were not regarded as important. However, a different experience than all the male participants in the study is Ahmed’s who pointed out that

for the final paper, students were instructed to write a research paper in any branch of “the field of the English language”. Moreover, Ahmed shared when students verified their topic choice with the instructor, they wrote the research paper without going back to the instructor nor sending drafts to him, and once they finished the paper, they sent it to the instructor directly. Generally, the female students experienced way less freedom when it came to the topic choices for their research papers, which proves that they are under rules that are proven to be less strict in the male section. Once again, an indication of a privilege not available to the female students.

### **The availability of sources**

Doing the assignments depended mostly on students’ efforts. Eman and Reem both reported having limited sources provided to them in the class to find research. Eman commented on how the university library didn't have materials available to help them “accomplish” the course writing, meaning that there were not specific materials for the English academic research course, and that they relied on themselves to search Google looking for sources. Eman indicated that the only books that were made available for English majors by the library were literature books (novels, short stories, etc). Eman wished the instructor had provided them with sources links that they can go to; “it would have made our work way better because I guarantee you that 70% of my class gave other people money to write their papers for them.” This statement by Eman was shocking to me not because I didn’t expect it, but because the estimated percentage she provided was high, which is an indication to how desperate some students have become. Eman believed that since no specific sources were provided to them many students just "cut it short and asks someone to do [the research] for [them].”

One of those students who cut it short was Reem who admitted to having someone else do the writing for her in the final research paper because she does not trust her own English

writing skills. Reem was honest in saying that she did not have a writing sample to show me from her research because she did not write it herself! I think such a claim could be taken very seriously in English speaking countries, but the rejection of plagiarism has just recently started to establish roots in many college classes across Saudi Arabia. Although Reem failed to write the course's final paper, she did admit that the instructor allowed students to use sources from any website as long as they confirmed the credibility of the website with her first.

Although plagiarism is a serious matter in the academic world, as a student, I hardly remember my professors or instructors ever talked about it. However, from what the participants have shared, the plagiarism situation has changed dramatically, and now there are more content and materials educating students about it. However, it is still one of the issues that English students struggles with. In Lauren Lukkaril's (2012) study, she noticed that for her English language learners, "the underlying cultural values associated with plagiarism and writer responsibility were challenges." Confirming that these learners "struggled with knowing what had to be acknowledged when it was borrowed and what could be said without acknowledgement ... with understanding and predicting what readers must know in order to follow their arguments." (p. 277) Lukkaril (2012) provides one of the most convincing descriptions of plagiarism saying:

Plagiarism is linked to the idea of individual ownership. Words and ideas like cars and houses belong to specific individuals, and because they give individuals a competitive edge, their ownership must be acknowledged. If they are not acknowledged, the offender has in effect stolen something that belonged to someone else. Thus, in terms of competition, plagiarism gives the offender an unfair advantage, while it denies the owner their rightful advantage

(p. 212)

The experience of Badriah who was in a section taught by a male instructor seemed to be not much different from Eman and Reem as well. She indicated that they were instructed to “look into academic and scholarly magazines” to look for sources, but she was not familiar with open access to locked research sites, and she did not mention anything about the instructor providing them with sources or websites they can check, so they were on their own in that matter as well.

Also, similar to the observations of Eman and Reem, Abdelaziz mentioned that in the male section of the course, students were on their own finding sources on the internet, saying, “there are many sources online, but the professor doesn't show us where to look online.” When I asked about the university library websites, Abdelaziz mentioned that the university library was not helpful for them as English majors, since what was available for them are just a few general books. Another male student, Faisal mentioned that the course was weak in enlightening them with how to do research or find sources, they were on their own doing that, he even was surprised to learn that something like “Google scholar” existed, which I found to be a little odd. He indicated that there were no clear-cut instructions on how and where to find sources, and that when students including him relied on using Wikipedia, the instructor told them that it was not acceptable. In that sense, it seems that when it came to available sources the male section was not more privileged than the female section.

Knowing where to look and how to look for sources for academic research writing is considered as the core of the course. When I was doing my bachelor’s degree, I was never taught how to find research or where. Obviously at the time, there was not a library website, nor a useful on-site library that would facilitate finding research as an English major. All what we



had back then was a copy center to get a copy of paperback books that professors and instructors made. If we needed a specific book, we would always get it from a private library of campus. Obviously, I cannot speak about the experience of those who were in other majors as I assume their experience might had been different than mine since the education language for them was mostly Arabic. However, in 2021, from the responses of most participants in this project, I can tell that the participants experience is not very different from mine. Earlier, Eman expressed her frustration about not finding resources at the university library that are specifically useful for English academic writing. Or that the library's website function was only to find the location of hard books on the campus library shelves. Also, she wished her instructor provided them with links or resources to go to, as they were on their own looking for sources and information by themselves.

When navigating the electronic services of the university site, there is a link for "central library" when I clicked on it, I noticed that the library site was straight forwards and easy to navigate. Although there were several tabs on the top that I was not sure about like "knowledge portal" and "find it fast." I appreciated that there was "a quick search" bar and the option to search different locations of library depending on the campus (boys or girls.) The central library site serves those who are looking for a specific material on a specific location, it might have the option of materials available online for affiliates, but not for an outside person. Also, under "electronic services" of the university website, there was a specific link for the Saudi Digital Library (SDL) that university affiliates can use. SDL is the official and most popular national digital library in Saudi Arabia and from my experience it is very useful. It provides users with free access to thousands and thousands of resources including, journals and E-books. However, none of the participants in this study, both female and male, mentioned SDL, even though they

mentioned Google search and Google scholar, which is an indication that they might not know about it and that their instructors did not show it to them.

### **The focus on spelling and grammar**

Reem's experience in the course was not all boring as she referred earlier, because she indicated that the instructor focused on grammar and that was a good experience from the class. Reem elaborated; "[the instructor] used to discuss some grammatical rules with us, we were learning interesting things." The focus on grammar was confirmed by Eman as well, as she indicated "[the instructor] does not focus on ideas [in writing], just grammar and structure." Eman added that focusing on "language, spelling, and grammatical errors" is what she experienced with the first and only assignment she got graded. From another section, Leena as well mentioned that her instructor focused on "grammar and structure more than anything else." Leena claimed that grading written assignments was not fair since the focus of it was grammar and structure.

In the male section, Khaled confirmed that in the course they are obligated to write a research paper by the end of the semester, yet he is not looking forward to that at all because he saw himself as someone who has "so many spelling mistakes," and spelling mistakes are not tolerated by instructors. Khaled explained that instructors' focus on spelling in writing exceeds their focus on grammar saying, "it's important that the word is spelled and written right more than grammar." From the same class, Abdelaziz also confirmed that the focus is on spelling and grammar first, then on the general idea of a writing piece second. Just like his two classmates Khaled and Abdelaziz, Mohammed mentioned that most instructors focused on spelling in students' writings. Although he didn't write anything yet for the course when I interviewed him, he didn't anticipate his instructor being any different from other instructors in that matter.

Mohammed described the way instructors grade those mistakes by indicating that for every two spelling mistakes, a student loses a point, and that instructors provide the correct spelling when they find a mistake. Another point that Mohammed mentioned to illustrate how instructors focus on spelling is that some of them even asked students to write down the questions for exams just to test their spelling skills. Then, after the instructor grades the answers, he puts students down by saying that they even cannot write a question, and when they ask him why he didn't write it to them, he says "why are you English majors then?"

Instructors' judgement of students' spelling and grammar competency is related to their belief of the students' language deficiency, which has been reported by other scholars (Asiri, 2017, Alrabai, 2014). Such judgment puts huge pressure on students and block them from learning anything. In Ebtehal Asiri's (2017) study that focused on Saudi English teachers, a participant "hoped her students could sound like Americans." (p.81) This shows how much unseen pressure some Saudi students are under while trying to effectively communicate in English, I imagine that this unseen pressure would be more intense if those students where English majors like Mohammed and the participants of this current study. Consequently, this would lead students to unbearable anxiety and stress, so to avoid some of this stress a lot depends on the instructors.

According to Leslie Siebert (2003), "teachers must still realize that no matter what types of explicit messages students receive, they are not likely to just "learn" that language learning is more than grammar and vocabulary and that it is not really very important that they speak with an "excellent" accent," or as in Mohammed's case write in an accurate spelling and grammar. (p33) Siebert (2003) admits that nothing about applying this approach is easy for instructors and students, especially "when only traditional learning outcomes such as grammar, vocabulary,

and pronunciation are evaluated in the language class.” (p.33)

In another male section, Faisal confirmed the focus on grammar and spelling. Faisal considered the struggle that some students had with grammar as “a problem” that caused them to lose grades when instructors graded their work. Faisal’s indication that for students’ struggle with grammar as a problem is important here. This struggle is related to the students’ old perception of English as merely a subject of grammar. Al harthi (2016) argues that a learners’ communication in English is more than just grammar. In other words, Al harthi (2016) considers grammar as an effective tool to be “competent” in a second language communication, but it does not operate the whole communication, writing:

pupils’ negative attitudes towards English could be justified with their belief that English is only a concrete subject rather than a live language. Therefore, a second or foreign language is not only a concrete subject or a group of grammar rules to be studied, but also a dynamic process of communicative competences that allow learners to use language practically as a tool of communication. In addition, it is essential to understand that the main aim of learning grammar rules is to employ those rules communicatively in everyday life (Long, 1981, 1996). (p.386)

Although some female participants indicated that grammar and spelling was the focus of their female instructors when grading their written work, it seemed as more of an issue to the male participants than to them. It seemed that the female participants were more bothered by the lack of support and attention they received from their instructors, more than being bothered by their instructor’s focus on grammar and spelling. This is explained through the standpoint of English- major Saudi women who might not be making too much grammatical mistakes

because they truly are better writers than the men. As indicated in the introduction, these women take being English majors seriously and do seem to make more effort learning the language than the men. Another possible explanation is that these female students might not be getting much evaluated work back from their female instructors, which is unfair to them and puts them in a grey area where they don't know what aspect of the language they need to improve.

### **Language Practice**

The experience of practicing the language including writing was different from one female participant to another. In Abeer's experience, she indicated that her instructor "spoke fast" so students had to write their notes "fast" to "keep up with her speech." This can be taken as an advantage and a disadvantage of class. Although keeping up with the fast pace the instructor took was overwhelming for students, it trained them to write quickly, even if it is writing what they hear in Arabic. This has made students look up the words after class, which resulted in the students learning "the meaning and spelling of new academic terms," as Abeer saw it. "My research writing improved after the class," Abeer thought, due to the different forms of writing she did for the group assignments. Abeer does not deny that she is not knowledgeable in other parts of research writing, since she was not responsible for writing them in groups' assignments.

Leena shared the same observation as Abeer regarding her writing skill saying, "my writing improved greatly, and I learned a lot from class." This improvement is due to the type of academic writing they produced in class, which was unlike other classes that did not require the same level of formal writing as this course. Leena admitted that "[she] still experiences difficulty, but [her] writing is more academic than before." She thought that her form of

communication has slightly changed even outside of class, in the terms she chooses when speaking. She now chooses academic terms more than ever in her everyday communication.

When Sarah was asked whether she thought her writing skill improved after taking the course, she said “yes, my writing developed from the class”. Then, she added that she did not write a paper from scratch for the academic research course, but rather used a research paper she wrote for a previous class, just adding to it or modifying parts of it. So I asked her again if she thought she learned something new about writing that she felt improved her writing skill, and she replied “no, nothing new, everything I know before since year one.” Sarah’s indication that all the information shared in class is repeated and known to her from year one made me think of my own experience as a previous English major. I recall taking writing courses that built on each other, but I don’t recall learning about academic writing or MLA style in the early years of the major. Also, other female participants in here have shared that the course is different from previous writing course they have taken.

One of the points that should be mentioned in this chapter is the weak language skills of many Saudi English learners in general and many Saudi English majors in specific when they enroll in the university. This has been discussed by a multitude of research (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Al-Seghayer, 2005). In the past, when a student graduates high school, their high grades and GPA allow them to become an English major when they get to college. However, in recent years, a new language proficiency measurement test called [Standardized Test of English Proficiency \(STEP\)](#) was created by the Saudi National Center for Assessment in Higher Education (Qiyas). It offers many types of required tests for high school students to assess them before getting to higher education. Qiyas is an affiliate of the [Education & Training Evaluation Commission \(ETEC\)](#) which “play a leading role in enhancing the quality and efficiency of

education and training in the Kingdom to reach outstanding international levels.” (EETC mission vision and goals online) According to Qiyas website, STEP is “designed in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages” and “targets students who wish to join English language programs in Saudi universities, as well as scholarship programs. It also caters to programs which require a certain level of English language proficiency, and individuals who wish to obtain evidence of English language proficiency (i.e., a certificate or grade).” Therefore, the idea of this test is like IELTS or TOEFL, but perhaps less intimidating and less complex.

With this in mind, some female participants in this project emphasized that the language itself is hard for them and what is expected of them as English majors is beyond their skills. For example, what Reem referred to earlier about immediately starting the English major with learning English literature, which is way beyond their abilities as non-native speakers of English and as new high school graduates. Then, when students continue their education in the same major, as English juniors or English seniors, they are expected to write five-to-six-page long research papers, but their acquired language skills do not help them to write such papers.

Seeing that most female participants described themselves or other female students as having less language competency than male students was surprising. I expected female students to refer to their hardworking efforts to learn English as showing in the way they communicate successfully in the language, given the fact that they admit to being less socially active than male students who have more life-exploring activities and experiences<sup>15</sup>. Also, research by Saba (2013) on Saudi ESL students learning academic English writing concludes that, “the female

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<sup>15</sup> By life-exploring activities and experiences I mean the capability to travel abroad, live independently, and work in any occupation. All of these are available options for females by the law, but by the culture, many families still don't accept it.

students had a better writing background in both Arabic and English than the male students,” which showed in the way they communicated in the class. Saba (2013) described female students’ attitude towards “both the teacher and the need to learn” as “positive” and “has helped them move up, not only in terms of language acquisition, but also in terms of critical thinking.” Which is unlike male students who undervalued writing and lacked motivation. (p.223)

However, how the Saudi female participants in my study viewed themselves as language learners is not only exclusive to them, because it seems that other females learning a foreign language agree with this. In Larisa Nikitina & Fumitaka Furuoka (2007) study which was conducted on students learning Russian, “the male respondents were quite confident in a successful outcome of their language study, and more of the male students were convinced that ultimately they would learn to speak Russian very well ... compared to the female students.” (p.10) The study ultimately revealed that “differences in beliefs about and attitudes towards language learning can be viewed as culturally-determined and are shaped by the students’ previous learning experiences ... rather than gender-related.” (Poltzer, 1983, as mentioned in Nikitina & Furuoka, 2007, p.10) This, in my study’s case, proved to be true because the female students in the Russian language study, appeared to be more confident language learners than the male students, where the Saudi female students in this study were not so confident.

Not only was affective communication in English hard for the female students, but also, they were unable to navigate other options that would help them facilitate the communication. One option is to use Arabic, when necessary, which was a restriction for all of female participants. Eman stressed the fact that in the class “speaking Arabic is not allowed to the point where whoever speaks it will be kicked out from class.” She claims that even emails sent in Arabic “will not get a response from [the instructor].” When asked “what if in class you don’t



understand something the instructor says, or she doesn't understand something you say, what is the situation then?" Eman responds, "she will embarrass you in front of the class." Then, she continues explaining how from personal experience, she was pushed to respond to the instructor's question in English even though she did not know the words. "This situation happened to me, I didn't have words to explain, so she told me "I don't get it, explain again, what do you mean?" I told her I don't have vocabulary to explain, so she said "no, talk!" an indication that she should speak in English. Eman continues "I had to seek help from a friend sitting next to me who helped me explain my answer to the instructor."

When Eman described this personal situation, she was clearly very emotional. It is not that she did not know the answer because she did, but her limited vocabulary did not help her to say it. This instructor was a native speaker of Arabic too, so I believe she should have been more flexible in this situation because she was an English learner once and she should have been empathetic with this student. With that said, I understand why the instructor acted in such a harsh way. Part of teaching English to speakers of other languages (in this case Arabic) is to push students to the zone of proximal development (ZPD), a concept introduced by Vygotsky in the mid 1930s. The concept states that for any learner to learn any knowledge, they need to be pushed from their comfort zone, a zone where they can do something comfortably without support, to a zone above their ability, where they do something with help and support. The result would get the learner to reach a stage where they can do things that they were unable or incapable of doing before. As reported by Oxford (1997) ZPD is "the realm of potential learning that each learner could reach within a given developmental span under optimal circumstances and with the best possible support from the teacher and others in the environment." (p.448)

According to Reem, her language skills are “humble” and the reason for that is “the language itself was difficult, and I was not able to write research yet, I don't know how to say something in an academic way, I can have a casual conversation, but not express my ideas in an academic way.” I see this as a possible reason for many students in the class. Reem admitted to understanding all the steps for academic research writing; in fact, she explained the process of doing research and structuring the paper to the person who wrote the paper for her, saying in a plural voice, “we instructed whoever was writing our papers about every step, we know how to do a research paper, but we do not know how to write it.” With this reference, students are not struggling with the process and structure, but with the writing and language itself.

### **Does someone's sex influence their learning of English?**

Wondering about the language skills of participants has led me to asking the ultimate question; does being a female or a male influence the learning of English? Since the majority of female participants viewed their English language skills as humble and needing of improvement; while the male participants did not comment on their language skills nor compared it to the females. I had to ask participants about whether or not they saw their sex as influencing their learning of the English language in general, or English writing specifically. Although it was quite clear that female participants had much clearer idea of how society, including their instructors, view them, and what expectations they had to fulfill as females, most participants didn't see their sex as a factor in learning English or English writing. However, participants perceptions about this topic are unique and should be highlighted.

Eman saw being a female “does not have influence on [her] learning English” and that if any person seriously decided to learn something, they would do it even if they are “the busiest.” Thus, being busy, would not stop her from learning the language. The same opinion was carried

by Reem who was direct and concise in believing that there is no influence of her being a female “at all” on her learning English writing, or English in general. Just like Eman and Reem, Badriah saw “no influence” of the fact that she is a female on her learning of English or English writing. Although she acknowledged that a female might face some challenges in her road of learning, but she thought it would not stop a female. Badriah recognized writing as a skill that everybody is capable of improving, and that there is no influence of one’s sex over the improvement of that skill.

Abeer and Leena both agreed with the other female participants that there is no influence of being a female on learning English. Abeer clarified that “if being a woman had influence on learning English, it would be positive.” She said that she observed on Twitter many Saudi females with “good English writing skills” communicating fluently with native speakers of English. Abeer finished her description of this observation with “they are great writers even though they are women”. I did not take this last sentence as a compliment to those skillful female writers, as I felt it carrying a stereotypical hidden view of women as “surprisingly” capable of doing something right. I feel that this is part of the view that some Saudi females carry of themselves and of females in general, as weak, and as dependent on the male. This view of self is not created overnight, as it is the result of years of viewing self as such. This form of communication with native speakers of English, in Abeer’s opinion, indicates that “females care more about improving their English.”

Then, Abeer evaluated her own English writing skill saying “I have experience in Arabic writing, but still fighting English writing”; however, she made sure to clarify how her struggle with English writing does not represent all females as she referenced in the Twitter female writes. Finally, Abeer conceded that there is no difference between a male or a female in the

writing ability “our brains are the same, so our writing will be the same, we all have the ability to learn and to write.” Leena, on the other hand thought that when it comes to learning English, being a female is not different than being a male, she still has “the right to learn.” She said, “nothing influences me no matter what, as long as I do it within the limits of observing God and practicing my religion.” Similarly, Leena saw no influence of her sex on learning English writing, as the same rule is in affect here too.

Sarah on the other hand, believed that because she is a female, she has limited access when it comes to communicating in English with people outside, which is something that she saw males can do easily. Sarah thought that as a woman it is hard for her to go out and communicate with others, like men do. Men can meet up someone they don't know just to talk to them in English over a cup of coffee for example, which is an action that many women would not do. Not because someone restricted them from doing it, but because it is considered culturally unfamiliar and, in many cases, unaccepted. Sarah said “men have freedom in going out anytime, unlike [women],” which is still true to many families. With that being said, Sarah believed that being a female has no influence on her learning of English writing specifically. She thought that a male and a female can learn and practice writing the same way because it is a matter of following fundamental rules and that's it, unlike speaking which depends on the social interaction you have using the language.

Switching to the male participants, Khaled did not think that being a male has any influence on learning English or learning English writing saying, “education is education;” meaning that everyone learns the same way, and someone’s sex does not have an influence over their education ability. This opinion by Khaled is contradicted by Abdelaziz, who thought that being a male gave him vantage point in learning more spoken English and in improving it.

Abdelaziz answered, “definitely! Because I’m a man I mingle with people a lot, especially men. I can go out of the house more and can travel freely and practice English more. Unlike girls who might be a little shy to practice the language”. Since Abdelaziz assumed that “girls” do not have the chances he mentioned, I asked him about the many opportunities available for someone to practice and improve English nowadays, which are available on social media sites or different apps or platforms, and whether or not using them makes a difference in someone’s language proficiency level. He replied “those websites are definitely helpful and useful in practicing the language, but traveling abroad, socializing, and talking to people face to face is way better from an educational standpoint and a practical one. Besides, it benefits people by improving their acquired English accent”. Abdelaziz seemed to be a strong believer in the influence of him being a male on his English-speaking skill, but when I asked about writing, he indicated that it is not influenced by being a male, but speaking is.

Supporting the perspectives of Khaled and Abdelaziz is Mohammed. He firmly believed that English and English writing can be learned by anyone whether a male or a female, so gender has no relation to learning the language, but working hard has. Mohammed believed that being “diligent” makes anyone fluent in the language, and that “not taking learning seriously is a problem that will impact a student's life”. Also, Faisal, like the other male participants, believed that being a man doesn't influence his learning of English, referencing that everything is available around the clock, and anyone can access any course or any piece of information any time from any place. However, Faisal admitted that being a man gave him chances to practice the language orally more than women highlighting the same facts that other female and male participants indicated earlier. Faisal indicated that when it came to English writing, both female and male students got equal chances to practice writing equally, which is not the same as English

speaking. Ahmed agreed with the majority as well, indicating that “men and women can study in college the same way”; therefore, no difference in learning would occur.

### **Improving the Course’s Experience for Future Students**

When asked about who needs to improve performance in the course to create a better class experience for coming students, participants were divided between instructor of the course or the students in the course, or both. Eman thought that both need to improve their performance to “get better results,” emphasizing, “if the instructor give it her all and look at us as the future, only then students will give [the class] their best, they will say ‘I’ll make my instructor proud,’ but if the instructor doesn’t care, the student will not care either, they will hand the work to someone else to do it.” Eman’s words felt genuine and spoke truth to reality as she speaks from her “unfair” experience in the class. Reem agreed with Eman that students and the instructor should improve their performance and gave more specific reasons to why she thinks so. She believed that students’ language needs to improve by “attend[ing] language courses,” and that they should read simplified readings in their research topic, then try their best to write about it using academic language. At the same time, the instructor should lecture “less” and “give students a chance to discuss the material more since there was no group discussion in class.” I think Reem’s suggestion about giving students a chance to discuss material is great because it is a chance to guide them throughout the process and material provided to them.

In a different class, Abeer was very direct in saying that students are the one who needs to improve their performance in the course. Switching assignments to group work instead of individual work was a decision the instructor made after the outbreak of COVID-19 and the switch to online instruction. And since most of the assignments were group assignments, Abeer observed in those groups that “students were careless”; she specifically says ما يدرون عن ربي وين

حاطهم which is a common colloquial Arabic that translates literally to “they don’t know where God placed them.” It basically means students are unaware of what is going on in the course or what the instructor is asking from them. Abeer confirmed that even under the COVID-19 circumstances and the switch to online instruction, her instructor was “very clear and detailed” besides, she described instances where her instructor seemed to be engaged and committed to teaching the course, like teaching them how to “write an introduction in detail.” Therefore, the students’ handling of the course is what needs improvement not the instructor.

I found Abeer’s view interesting because it is not expected in this particular chaotic situation, especially that Leena who shared the same class as Abeer thought that having group work is “the most enjoyable experience in class.” Leena described the collaboration between students as “great” and that it gave them a chance to “discover [their] talent in writing.” When asked who should improve the performance in class, Leena said “maybe students;” however, admitted that she cannot comment on every student in class, but the group she worked with on assignments were supportive and cooperative, which is unlike what Abeer experienced.

Badriah responded to the question about improving performance in the class with, both students and instructor needs to improve performance. On one hand, the instructor made Badriah “bored” most of the time, and “he was not enthusiastic and not into teaching.” On the other hand, the students were “sleeping” most of the time because “the class was in the afternoon during summer and Ramadan”; because of this, “the majority were not into the class and there was little interaction.” Badriah explained further, “a writing class should be in the morning when you are fresh, and your mind is working!” which is obviously not the experience she had. The fact that the class occurred during the month of Ramadan made the experience worse because everyone was fasting, and sleep deprived.

Inputs about improving the course for the male students was not that different from the female students. When Khaled was asked about who should improve their performance in class, he was not sure what to say, indicating that he had no clue about students' performance level. Khaled said that his instructor had "high performance" and so did not need to improve his instructional performance, even though he mentioned earlier the use of traditional educational methods that don't motivate students to learn, and the discussion of dull topics that don't interest the young students. I believe the reason for Khaled's uncertainty here is that the class does not meet regularly due to the instructor's special circumstances. With Khaled's classmate Abdelaziz, "the students" are the one who "needs to improve their performance first" because they need to "learn how to write and practice writing a lot to improve their writing and their style." I think that Abdelaziz's response to this question is not quite sincere for two reasons. First, when he discussed the class advantages and disadvantages earlier, many of the disadvantages he highlighted were either directly or indirectly referring to the instructor not students. Second, I believe that blaming students for "lacking performance" in the course comes from the default assumption that many eastern students carry about themselves.

Claims that students are not doing enough individual effort to learn, or not fully utilizing the knowledge handed to them on a golden platter are typical claims for this default assumption. It is embedded in the ideology that many eastern families carry, including Saudi families, that their son or daughter need to always be in the top of the class, and need to always be studying. This was evident in Chambers (2009) who studied the influence of the Arab parents' involvement in their elementary kids' academic progress and found that Arab immigrant parents had "much higher expectations for their children in schools" compared to those born in the US. (p.17) Also, Chambers (2009) indicated that most of the Arab parents she surveyed



“would appreciate more homework assigned to their children” and more school projects especially during school break. (pp. 74-75) So, in the English writing course, and any other course for that matter, if there is someone “slacking” in doing their role in class, it is almost always going to be the student. To add a cherry on top, Abdelaziz hoped that the instructor would assign ungraded writing assignments to students to practice writing freely, even if this idea would not be supported by everyone. Faisal, who was in a different class, indicated that the instructor is the one who needs improvement, but the department chair is the one who needs to be blamed because he gave the course to an unqualified instructor. He indicated that students were lost and struggled with class. Therefore, the change in class structure is an administrative improvement level rather than an instructor improvement level.

The last male participant, Ahmed, had an alternative perspective about the course’s performance enhancement as he saw the syllabi as needing improvements. Ahmed referred that when it came to enhancing performance in the class, the syllabus itself is what needed to be improved, not the instructor nor students. According to Ahmed, his instructor was very cooperative and when students did not get certain points, he “explained it to them over and over again.” Therefore, there is an indication here that the instructor made effort to explain materials to students, but since those materials were too complex to comprehend anyway, there is nothing the instructor could have done to make it easier for students.

### **The Essence of the Phenomenon of Studying an Academic English Writing Course in a Foreign Context**

Looking back at the information that participants shared in this chapter, I have reached the conclusion that there is a huge misunderstanding and uncertainty about the nature of an academic research and writing course. In both female and male interviews, I sensed an overall

confusion about what the Academic Research and Writing course is supposed to teach or include. Some talked about how their instructors focused on plagiarism and the need for them not to plagiarize, while the majority agreed that no in-class writing activity was present. Many spoke about the focus of instructors on grammar and spelling; however, this seemed like more of a problem for the male students than the female students. There seemed to be some instruction given on what a literature review is or what is considered credible sources, but I sensed that these topics were not the focus of the course. The expectations from female and male students were to produce grammatically correct and lexically accurate texts, and not to write valuable content and acquire effective research skills and under this reality, students didn't have a clear idea about in-class activities.

The majority explained how they didn't do in-class discussion or group activities, but what I have noticed is that most did not quite understand how writing would be part of in-class activities. I sensed that most did not get the meaning of active in-class writings because they were not familiar with the idea. I saw this confusion interesting because a language classroom needs to incubate a level of active classroom experience that students would not find in any other class. A language learning classroom, especially a language writing classroom, needs to have "a unique socio-educational environment" where "learners need to speak and to interact with the classmates considerably more than they might be required while learning other subjects." (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2007, p.2) The lack of affective in-class interaction with the instructor and fellow students was reported by all female and male participants in this study. This is an indication for a desperate need to have more structured and supportive interaction.

An interesting observation from the female participants' perceptions is that they all agreed on the idea of male students being "spoiled" because they are not under constant

scrutiny from their instructors as female students. Even a few male students referred to this indicating their knowledge about how the female section is a little strict, which is proof that this is sort of a general knowledge that many seemed to agree on. Also, all female participants agreed that male instructors are more flexible and “easy going” when it comes to grading or assigning work, which is a privilege they indicate male students enjoying all the time. In describing the course instructional structure, students from both sections agreed on the lack of theme for the class. Meaning that there is no general idea that compile the course’s content together. This is unlike the structure of English composition course in the US, where there must be an umbrella theme or topic combining the materials of a composition class together. Focusing on assignments, grammar and spelling came as the most focused on when their writings are being evaluated by instructors.

When thinking about why instructors give grammar and spelling this much attention, it comes to mind how natives of English view the concept of writing well. Reichelt et al. (2012) mentioned that “attention to composition in English is driven by a strong writing tradition solidly grounded within British and American culture. A hallmark of the educated person is thus partly defined by the ability to write correctly.” (p.28) This attention to grammar and spelling transferred from the practices of native speakers of English to the non-natives. According to Reichelt et al. (2012), teachers of foreign languages adapt writing-teaching approaches that view writing as “a vehicle for language practice,” instead of creating real writers out of their students. Instructors like this set a goal for the writing assignments that mainly emphasizes “grammatical correctness at the expense of communicative content.” I believe this description of foreign language instructors is applicable to instructors who teaches EFL because it is apparent that the same practices happen in EFL classrooms as well, as this

current study indicate. (p.28)

From the study, it seems that highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of each section of the course is important part of the students' experiences in their separated sections. It has been established that the positive and negative points of the class differed across participants' experiences. It is interesting to see that these points were also different in the experiences of students who shared the same section of the course with the same instructor. For example, Although Eman and Reem shared the section and the instructor, they did not share the same positive and negative points about the class which was evident in their experiences. This shows that the lived experiences of participants differ according to their personal perceptions of what is important and what is not. It is an implication of how experiences can vary even in shared settings. The individual and composite portraits of experiences shared is what makes the essence of the phenomena of studying this specific course in this specific unique context.

Eman and Reem's perceptions about the course were different based on how fully engaged they were in the course. Reem confessed that she didn't write her final paper, which suggests that her engagement in class was lacking. Unlike Eman, who did her own work, but was upset the most about how the instructor handled the course. In the same way, Abeer and Leena had different perceptions about the effectiveness of group work. Abeer thought that her learning could have enhanced if she worked individually because group work negatively influenced her learning of academic writing. Leena on the other hand, thought that group work was a positive point in class to the point where she wished it would resume after the pandemic.

Overall, this course seemed to be more appropriate for students to take in the beginning of their major, maybe 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> year, because now they take it in their 4<sup>th</sup> year and they are not benefiting from it. Also, I assume that when students first major in English, they do at least one

research paper, so it makes sense to offer a core class in academic research writing during their early years towards the degree. Doing this would prepare students for writing proper academic papers for their other classes and beyond. Abeer shared that in one of her previous classes she had to write an abstract for a research paper, but then she did not know what an abstract is because she is not familiar with the word or the concept. She talked about that experience and how she reflects on it now; “I didn’t know what to write in the abstract, so I copied a few sentences from the essay and put it in the abstract. I know that my instructor then thought I was dumb, but now I know what my mistake was.”

Abeer’s lack of knowledge is nothing but an affirmation that students should take the academic research course early in their degree. Students are being asked to write papers in their courses, but many of them lack previous knowledge for writing English academic papers. However, given the fact that students’ English language skills might not be as developed as it is when they are closer to graduation, the structure of the course needs to be simplified or revised to reflect the fact that it is being given to students who rank in the English proficiency level from beginning to intermediate. When Abeer was asked of whether she thinks the course should be given to first- or second-year English college students, she very confidently says “no, the course is very dense” which suggest that the course in its current format will be difficult for 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> year students who will more than likely have less language proficiency than 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year students. Also, having established that the course looks different to female students than male students considering the standpoints of the female students, it would be interesting to see how the course for female students in their first year of college would be different than that of their males counterpart.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **PERCEPTIONS OF MIXED-SEX CLASSES**

#### **Chapter Introduction**

This chapter explores the current and future relationship and communication between female and male students in Saudi sex-separated education, and investigates the nature of this communication through students' perspectives. Ultimately, the chapter leads to discussion of mixed-sex education when participants connect with their deeper thoughts by imagining a hypothetical situation in which classes become mixed: how do they anticipate these communications becoming? Within the chapter, there is an exploration of the Saudi society's view of women, which is done through explaining common phrases about women (almost like aphorisms) publicly used in society.

The most significant point that all participants agreed on is the absence of physical or formal communication between students from the two branches. The only type of communication available that participants agreed on unanimously is an informal communication through a smartphone app called "Telegram." This app is well known for efficient communication with a large number of people. Through the app, students exchange materials and news related to their courses or their separate branches. Beyond this, female and male perceptions are explored in the same manner as chapter 4. Here are the themes highlighted in this chapter; communication among opposite branch students, attitudes about opposite branch instructors, taking the communication between both students to the next level, a comparison between the separated classes vs mixed, and finally the chapter ends with The Essence of the Phenomena of Communication with the Opposite Sex.

## Communication among Opposite Branch Students

Since the communication between students from the two branches was done solely through Telegram, I asked participants about the nature of that communication. Eman said that the Telegram group chatting channel was created by two female students and it expanded to include many female and male students. Although she indicated that she is unaware of the circumstances behind creating this group, it is obvious that it was created to exchange information or knowledge about any subject or course in the department. Eman confirmed that the communication via Telegram was “respectful” and “helpful.” Eman talked about the time when they asked their female instructor for the structure of an exam they were going to have, but she was not clear about what the exam going to cover. Naturally as students, they were concerned about it, until they asked male students over the Telegram group chat. “[Male students] send us helpful pdf files” she said, “files of questions they told us to study because their male instructor confirmed the exam will be the same way.”

Eman continued talking about the exam story, saying, “the final exam questions were from the files, yes, maybe our course was designed by our instructor, but the exam questions were the same as the male students.” Eman continued while sounding upset, “why did [the female instructor] leave us puzzled, while the male students had everything? It was unfair to not have what they had.” Eman viewed the treatment of male instructors with male students as “being lenient with them in all aspects”<sup>16</sup> which was not something the female students had in her opinion: “In our section, [female instructors] just say no no no!” Eman resumed talking about that incident, saying, “we [female students] took the files because we just needed it as reference<sup>17</sup>, it is a shock to read something before the exam then find it there. I swear the

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<sup>16</sup> By “lenient” here I mean flexible and easy going.

<sup>17</sup> Eman means by “reference” that they only wanted to review what they studied before the exam and not only

situation was just like that and this is not just my observation, this is reality!” The story that Eman shared surprised me. As a female English student who never had any communication with male English students during my early college years, I never thought of whether the materials or the papers I studied were the same as the ones male students studied. I don’t know if what Eman shared happened when I was a student, before the large boom in technology and the emergence of social media sites and apps.

There is a sense of desperation and intimidation the female students feel whenever they are being asked to do a major assignment or paper. Which is unlike what the male students seem to experience because for the male students there is a sense of affirmation that any work they present would be their best. From a female standpoint, these female students seem to be set for higher standards than the male students. These standards are not only set by their female instructors, but even the male instructors who teaches them occasionally. As if there is a burden that these female students carry called “the better students,” this burden make these students unequally standing in front of the male students. It seems like these female students always need to do better when presenting their original work to their instructors, there seemed to be higher standards for the work that these students present that are not expected to be met by the male students.

As I indicated earlier, Eman confirmed that this group chat was created by two female students, not the opposite. So, it could be that female students were worried about how their work might not get the praise or grades they want, so they were looking for help anywhere they could, including seeking help from male students. If this is not desperation and intimidation, it could simply be that female students are more mindful of their education, meaning that they

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depend on it while studying.



care more about their education and the work assigned to them. The female students' commitment to education was highlighted in Saba's study (2013) that investigated Saudi students' performance in an academic English writing class in the US. Saba says, "most of the female students seemed committed and motivated to perform well in class—they consistently participated in class writing activities and completed and presented their homework because they respected the teacher's authority." This was not the case with male students, who "rarely completed their homework, read the assigned reading, met writing assignment deadlines, or followed the directions for assignments." (p.104-105)

Moreover, Abdourahmane Barry (2019), in a study on the academic performance of Saudi male students vs Saudi female students, confirmed that "female students outperformed male students in academic achievement ... [where female students achieved] higher in math and science and their domains [knowing, applying, and reasoning.]" (p.14) The results from these studies were not that surprising to me. As an undergraduate English-major, I remember that I and other female English students were always told by male instructors who taught both sections that male English students were not as "excellent" or not as "hard working" or not as "committed" as us. This could be an indication that female students probably cared more about their course grades and performance.

Unlike Eman, who believed in the benefit of unofficial remote communication with male students, Reem believed that this type of communication is useless. Not only that, but Reem did not see any benefit in any type of communication with the male branch altogether. The only instance where Reem saw a potential benefit is if the final exam of a specific course were the exact same in both branches. I believe she is referring to the incident that Eman mentioned. For the academic research course, Reem referred to how sometimes male students

might have sections of the course highlighted as being very important by their instructors, which is an advantage male students might have over the female students; in that situation only, the male-female communication would be beneficial for both branches. Yet, Reem was particular in saying how female and male instructors who teach the opposite branches have different things to focus on while teaching the course, so “nothing is shared between female and male students” and communication is useless. Reem’s view here was shared by Abeer, who saw “no benefit nor interest in communication” with the male branch. Abeer’s reason for this is because female students do not share the same instructor nor the same syllabus with male students<sup>18</sup>, and since there is nothing in common with the male branch then there should not be any communication. Abeer said, while laughing, “if there is no shared benefit, then why do we need them?” which I think indicates that she does not like to deal or communicate with men.

Even though Reem and Abeer were against communication with the male students through a mobile app, it has been proven that such technology could help in overcoming “some cultural gaps caused due to segregation” in the Saudi higher education context. (Alasmari, 2020, p.555) This would lead to a generous amount of research on the influence of remote connection on the student’s educational and social life which could have future implications as well.

Another female participant, Leena, supported keeping the communication through online apps. She referred to her comfort using Telegram and her desire for the situation to remain the same because if it changed to face-to-face, it will not be useful for her. Leena suggested using WhatsApp for remote communication because it is more popular and

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<sup>18</sup> From what I found the syllabus is one “common syllabus” that is used by all instructors teaching the course. However, it could be that some instructors focus on points or parts of the syllabus that others don’t give much attention.

participants would get quicker responses than Telegram, and that it should be created and monitored by the department chair. Leena elaborated that some girls refused to use the Telegram group chat either because they are religious and they don't want to communicate with strange men, or because customs and traditions “reject the communication with strange men,” and these girls are abiding by these customs. Therefore, “a supervised WhatsApp group” would do the trick and will be way more accepted. Abeer agreed with Leena that if the communication is something that must happen, she recommended that “instructors combine female and male students in chatting group rooms, either on WhatsApp or Telegram”

The only female who seemed to support face-to-face communication with the opposite sex more than online communication was Badriah. She was with the opinion that calls for face-to-face educational communication between female and male students and between faculty of both branches. She saw such communication as “necessary” and “[society] is entering a new age with the 2030, so why does separation persist?” She confirmed that most likely “the future will involve mixing with males,” since getting a job or pursuing a degree will most likely involve communicating with men, so it’s unavoidable. Besides, Badriah believed that “females should have knowledge in talking and discussing with males,” which is an indication that females do not know how to speak to males in professional settings because it’s unfamiliar to them, and that communication with males while in college will help with this. Plus, Badriah predicted that men and women who are more comfortable with opposite sex interaction know exactly how to “deal with people who take [the interaction] personally,” meaning they know how to handle those who take the interaction as an invitation to intimacy. It is evident from what Badriah mentioned that the benefits of communication with the male students is purely social, and not so much educational.

Turning to the male students' perspectives about online communication with the female section. The male perceptions were a little discrete, but supportive of the idea. They preferred online communication with female students because they know that keeping distance and avoiding eye contact is what the culture is expecting from them as men. In the beginning, Khaled, Abdelaziz and Mohammed claimed that no communication with the female branch exist. However, when I asked about the Telegram app, they all seemed to know about it. It seems odd that they do not consider it as a form of communication, it seemed that to them the only legit communication with the female branch is a formal one through the university. However, Mohammed believed that the best method for communication with the opposite branch is to have a shared Blackboard that would merge all students who are enrolled in the same course in one Blackboard site. That way they all can benefit from the communication, and it would be official. Like Mohammed, Ahmed stood by online communication as the most ideal way of communication saying, "having chatting groups and platforms for communication is good." Ahmed indicated that in the past there was no communication with female students, but with the beginning of the pandemic, communication was established via Telegram. This has benefited students, since online education does not deliver information as well as in-person.

According to Ahmed, Telegram gave female and male students a chance to understand and share assignments related to the course in a time of need. However, Ahmed's piece of information about the establishment of the Telegram group was not quite accurate, because a couple female participants had used the shared female and male students' chatting group before the pandemic hit. Ahmed saw some benefit in the female and male interaction after the pandemic hit and thought that this type of communication is "useful" because after the pandemic it benefited them a lot. Faisal on the other hand, knew about the Telegram chatting

group, but he didn't see any benefit in joining it because there are not any commonalities between the two branches as he indicated. One of the reasons to why there is not communication between the two branches that Faisal pointed to, is the fact that the two branches exist in separated buildings in two different locations within the city. Female students have their own buildings and own professors, so they are independent from the male section. However, Faisal did not mind having communication with the opposite sex "to exchange knowledge and benefit from each other" such as the communication through Telegram.

### **Attitudes about Opposite Branch Instructors**

Eman commented on how having a male instructor "might be better" for female students, clarifying "the cooperation is going to be more." She confirmed "as English majors we never had a male instructor, our instructors are all women, male instructors only teach us during summer semester." Eman noted that the grades of most female students during summer semesters are "higher" than the rest of the year due to being taught by male instructors, since they only teach them during "the summer." Eman confirmed "male instructors take our needs into consideration;" she explained why she thinks that through a specific story. Eman explained how during a summer semester, she took a course with a male instructor and another course with a female instructor. The end of that summer semester occurred during the beginning of Ramadan. Eman said, "classes ended at sunset, and we were tired, so we asked the male instructor to cancel classes and we can go home prepare for Iftar<sup>19</sup> and help our families. [The male instructor] agreed to cancel the last two classes of the course." Eman continued, "but when we asked our female instructor, she said, "it is not my fault" and told us to buy prepared food [from a restaurant]." Eman commented on these incidents, saying, "he understood our

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<sup>19</sup> Iftar is the evening meal or the first meal after a day of fasting. Since it comes after a whole day of fasting, this meal usually consist of different dishes and drinks, so it takes time and effort to prepare.

situation, but she did not, even though she is a woman like us and knows."

What Eman referred to with the word "knows" is her female instructor's inability to sympathize with them as females, even though she knows the gender roles females are usually expected to fulfill in the traditional Saudi society, such as preparing and cooking meals for the family which are actions of care not expected nor asked from male students. These are life experiences that only women experience in the Saudi society. Generally speaking, all female students are either married and have a family of their own, so they want to go home to prepare Iftar for their family, or they are single and want to go home to help their mothers and/or sisters in preparing Iftar for the family. The female instructor's response that Eman referred to is unlike the response of the male instructor, who was sympathetic with them. The female instructor not only did not sympathize with the female students, but also, she told them to bring something already prepared for Iftar, which is not common in the in the first days of Ramadan in most households as many families prepare a feast almost every day of the first days of the month. Also, the female instructor assumed that all students could afford ordering large and different meals from a restaurant. For the most part, Eman indicated that the female instructor should have known better and responded differently to the female students' request since she is a woman and knows what is expected of them as caregivers for their families.

Adding to the point of how it "might be better" to have male instructors than female instructors, when Eman was asked about her opinion on having a male instructor teaching the academic research course, she answered "yes." Eman talked about some of her friends who took the course with a male instructor during the summer saying, "when we saw their papers and how cooperative their instructor was, we used their materials and some information they had from the instructors' slides." Eman explained that because of the clarity of the materials

that she took from the summer section students, and because of her experience in a summer course when she was taught by a male instructor, she believes that male instructors would be a better fit for teaching the academic research course and other similar courses. Eman explained further that, “male instructors explain things way better than female instructors,” adding, “many female instructors confuse us by bringing so much information at once.”

To show how male instructors are compared to female instructors, Eman gave an example of a female instructor who taught them a course before and was very dedicated, but “very unorganized,” as she described her. “[The female instructor] skips over information or go back to previous information, and we cannot keep up with her, she confuses us.” A solution students came up with to overcome this problem, as Eman said, was to “audio record the instructor during classes, then transcribe it at home”; however, Eman said that this method had its downsides because “sometimes they struggle with connecting the dots.” Eman’s indication about how male instructors were flexible and easy going with male students was not surprising. The performance expectations that male instructors have of male students is not as high as it is of female students, then it is needless to say that the way male instructors treat male students is justified.

The same agreement was expressed by Reem, who imagined classes becoming “easier” if female and male students shared classes taught by male instructors. The reasons for classes becoming easier according to Reem is that male instructors don't get into much details<sup>20</sup>, especially for doing research. In her perspective, male instructors are direct and clear in what they ask students for, while female instructors are “chattier,” which indicates that they might be confusing female students and making them become overwhelmed. Reem explicitly indicated

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<sup>20</sup> This means that male instructors don't overexplain how research should be done and written.

that she prefers the way male instructors teach because “they would understand that we are beginners.” Expanding this point, Reem indicated that for the academic research course, male instructors generally would understand that the students’ research is not going to be used for a masters or doctoral degree, so male instructors are flexible and realize the humble language skills of most students, which would not qualify them to write a full research paper. Also, Reem referred to grades, and how with male instructors, “[female students] would get better grades.”

Abeer who is against communicating with male students, thought that having a male instructor to teach them would not change her opinion about the lack of benefit in communicating with the male branch, but it would change the way classes are taught for them as female students. She predicted that the syllabus and the assignments given to them might become easier if they are taught by male instructors. This prediction is based on her observation of the assignments male students are given indicating that it is easier and that females have a lot on their plate. Abeer described how male instructors are flexible. The reason for this flexibility is in the way female instructors handle rules and instructions, as they are stricter and firmer in applying them more than male instructors.

In Abeer’s opinion, men in general are looser in following guidelines, and they sort of do whatever they wish. Abeer gave an example about her brother's school and her dad's job: she says that men are more likely to break the rules set for them, which is not the case for most women. “Women follow each other’s steps and track each other,” Abeer says, referencing what she believes women do in a job, they track each other’s footsteps and observes each other's work. There is an indication here that women can't work freely, as other female co-workers are constantly monitoring them and making sure they don't break any rules. Abeer sums up her opinion about this matter, saying, “males don't have commitment and females commit



excessively.” This can be understandable if we think about the standpoint of these women as expected to always fit the high standards society puts for them.

Another female perspective was given by Leena who thought that having a female instructor teaching in the two branches is “difficult” and would affect the female students negatively. Having a larger number of students to handle is the main reason she says that would “overwhelm” a female instructor which might affect them as female students in return, saying, “she will blow some steam on us.” Leena questioned the female instructor’s ability to be fair to students from both branches and to handle the stress of communicating with both. Leena shared that from her personal experience there is a difference in communication with men than with women. Communicating with men is “easy,” while communicating with women is “difficult.” She referenced how men have higher rank in society and so they see things as accessible and easy to do, while women see the opposite.

The above statement by Leena reflects her standpoint as a woman who experiences flexible treatment from the men, but not the women. In her perspective the reason women behave in the way they do is not because they want to make things hard for others, but because they didn’t experience getting things easy in life, they had to work and fight to get high ranks. However, when comparing this to men, yes working hard also pays off, but men don’t have to fight as hard as some of these women, and they don’t have to meet the same number of social expectations as women do.

With that being said, Leena spoke about her view of the situation if a male instructor was teaching them as well as the male students: “honestly from my education journey all these years no male professor was pressuring us, most were easy going with us regardless of the fact that we are females, regardless of any personal matters. I discovered that male professors were

easy going and understanding more. [Male instructors] take things easy and they accept excuses more while the female branch is stricter". What Leena refers to as "personal matters" is an indication that male instructors are tolerant and easy going by nature and not because they have personal attraction towards the female students they teach. In other words, Leena emphasized how male instructors are tolerant by nature, not because they have interest in female students, so emotions do not play a role here. Leena explained how this easy-going attitude by male instructors when dealing with students also occurs in the male branch, so it's not exclusive to the females. Because of this she described the male students' attitudes as "comfortable" because of how their male instructors are lenient with them. This is unlike the experience of female students who experience more pressure and scrutiny from their female instructors; therefore, go through uncomfortable and perhaps stressful course experience, which might influence their education negatively on the long run because they would graduate with little knowledge in their plate.

Moving on to the experiences of two female participants in this study, Badriah and Sarah, who had the experience of being taught by a male instructor in the course. Badriah viewed having a male instructor in the class as "make the situation easier for female students", when she was asked why she felt this way, she referred to how she sees females "understanding" materials "better"; therefore, this cleverness "might attract sympathy towards [students] through instructors." Badriah explained how having a shared male instructor for both female and male sections might make the situation better for the females because it might make the instructor realize that male students have a weaker base of knowledge and lower commitment to studying than females, so male instructors become more flexible, sympathetic, and cooperative with the females than the males. Badriah's point here is influenced by a

previous experience where she was taught by a male instructor and this instructor was very sympathetic and flexible with them, but strict with male students—"a totally different person" she said. According to Badriah, this male instructor had negative comments about him spread among students; many female students were very afraid of him at first because of that negative reputation. But Badriah said that after they finished the class, he gave most female students A and A+ because their work was worth it. He cooperated with the female students, unlike male students with whom he acted as a different person. Moreover, Badriah predicted that if a female instructor taught both female and male students, she might be stricter with females unlike males, which is unfair to female students.

Sharing the same view as Badriah was Sarah. She referred to female students as being "under more pressure than" male students. Sarah indicated that male instructors always share with them that their grades are "higher than" male students. This is an indication that female students are more dedicated to their education than the male students. I remember some of my male professors sharing the same piece of information with us when I was a student. Sarah believed that the higher grades are a result of female students being under "higher pressure" than the male students. So female students study more because they don't have the privileges that male students have when it comes to the quantity and quality of the materials they study.

Sarah viewed male students as having "more freedom" than female students. This freedom is because male instructors tell the male students what is important and not important to study, while female instructors don't usually do that. As a result, female students spend more time studying everything, while male students spend way less time, studying only the important parts. Sarah thought that this shows "the male branch as more cooperative than [the female] branch," emphasizing that not all female instructors are uncooperative. This corporation that the

male instructors have with students is explained through the power dynamics within departments. It has been established in the literature presented earlier in this dissertation, that the male section has more administrative and authoritarian roles than the female section, which puts them in a more powerful position than the female section; therefore, male instructors seem to have more freedom in setting out and breaking down some of the common rules, which is not the same for female instructors. Female instructors are expected to follow the rules set without modifications.

The cooperation of the male branch, represented by male instructors, with the female participants could possibly be a result of the greater power and authority they have that exceeds those of the female instructors. Saba (2013) indicated that “although female students have their own campus, faculty members, and administrators, the male section of the university holds all the authority. All decisions related to the female section in terms of appointments, promotions, awards, scholarships, etc. are issued by and from the male section.” (p. 91) Another research study by K. K. (2020) discussed the struggles that female academics experience because of the authority in hand of the male section in Saudi universities stating, “[the female section represented in female faculty and female students] are all extensions of men which results in their limited authority as female academics ... it takes longer time to address students' issues than it normally does at the men's administration ... [this has led to] the stereotype that women academics are insufficient and tend to complicate things for female students. Women academics have also limited authority on money related matters ... the department budget is handed to men's section first and the Head of department would spend it on the male's branch before the female's section.” (p.234)

The male students did not seem to have any opinions about how their male instructors

act. They didn't seem to have access to this type of knowledge because they don't have any other interaction to compare it to. Unlike the female students whose knowledge about how female instructors act compared to male instructors gave them multiple points to highlight. This is exactly what feminist standpoint theory calls for, the undiscovered knowledge in social construct that nobody else but women have access to. Obviously, the separation between the sexes in the Saudi higher educational system and the unique construction of it, allowed these women to have access to this unique knowledge. Therefore, the standpoint presented here is unlike any other in the world because it is distinct to the Saudi context and to the Saudi women.

With that being said, the male students commented on how having a female instructor might make their educational experience different. When I asked Khaled if he ever heard of a female instructor teaching a course over at the male section, he replied "no," and mentioned that "only once a female instructor wrote the final exam questions for us," which is something uncommon to happen. However, according to Khaled, if a female instructor teaches a course over at their branch, he imagines things looking a little different around class. "Guys will be more disciplined" he said, adding, "out of respect for her and they need to prove themselves." I believe this points to male students being disciplined to prove to the female instructor that they are good students worthy of grades. Khaled clarified the reason he thought guys becoming more disciplined if they were taught by female instructors is based on his observation of how guys behave around females in the outside world.

Khaled added that to him, being taught by a female instructor is not odd because he had already experienced this before, when he took English classes for a year in the UK after high school. However, to everyone else it might be strange at the beginning because "it is something new, but once [students] get used to it, it would become normal." When I asked Khaled how

that mixed class experience was in the UK, he replied, “it was a surprise, and I was so focused in class,” adding, “it was something new and uncomfortable in the beginning, but after doing group activities and exchanging conversations together it became better.”

Khaled’s classmate Abdelaziz did not have a broad studying experience, and never had the experience of being taught by a female or being a student in a mixed class. He thought that if male students were taught by a female instructor, the class situation would be new to them because it is an uncommon experience for them. With a female instructor, Abdelaziz signaled that the teaching, explanation, and materials will all be the same as now. “Teaching style will not be different” when taught by female instructors, because “every instructor has their own style” no matter male or female. When talking about students, Abdelaziz believed that male students might focus more in class because it's a new situation for them; however, he did recognize that some male students will have a difficult time “accepting and understanding the new situation at first” but “with time, will adapt to it.” It is important to mention here that since most of the male participants do not have experience with female instructors, they imagine the teaching and the class environment staying the same as now, with the only change being the overall class structure. However, female participants who already experienced having a male instructor had a different opinion, where they thought a class taught by a male instructor would be easier and more flexible.

Switching to Mohammed, when asking him more specifically about his opinion on being taught by a female instructor, he stated that if male students had a female instructor, it would be the first time in their life and it would be 180 degrees different compared to now. He said, “[students] will be shocked the first semester, but with time they will get used to it.” He predicted that male students would have a change in behavior if taught by a female instructor,

stating that they would be more “disciplined and excellent.” Moving to Faisal, he simply did not mind being taught by a female instructor, saying, “if she's knowledgeable and skillful, why not? We want to benefit from her.”

On a different note, when I asked Ahmed about his opinion of having one instructor to teach both female and male sections of a course, he said that it would be better to do that because it benefits students to all be on the same page. Also, Ahmed indicated that he has never been taught by a female instructor before, and he imagined that having a female instructor would be different and challenging to get used to because since elementary school he had been taught by male instructors. However, he did not anticipate any changes in the teaching methods of a female instructor when compared to male instructors; it is just a matter of getting used to the new situation. Also, having a female instructor would not change his learning acquisition. He emphasized that a professor's job is to teach courses regardless of being a male or a female.

Although Ahmed emphasized how the communication between female and male students increased after the pandemic, he was clear in saying that through this communication he noticed a difference in the way female and male students are being taught, saying, “in our section professors were more flexible and tolerant than those in the female section.” Ahmed added, “[male instructors] were more understanding of the new situation after COVID-19 than those in the female section.” This “understanding” indicates that instructors stressed important information for students and were flexible with students.

### **Taking the Communication between Students to the Next Level**

#### **Establishing connections**

When Eman was asked about the reasons for not having current professional and ongoing communication with male students, she indicated that it is not supported by society nor

by many students from both branches. Although she indicated that society is slowly changing from the point it used to be two years ago, there are still some families who are not in favor of speaking to non-relative males. She commented that some families might say to their daughters' things like "what is the benefit of communicating with men?" or "just study and that's it, you don't need to talk to men" or "why do you need someone to tell you what to study?" These are all examples that Eman gave about some families' reaction to their daughters' participation in a mixed-sex study group chat. By mentioning these examples, Eman is aware of why there is not an official communication through the university because some people would be against it, even if the change is coming. As an insider, my sense of this is that even families who accept their female daughters' unofficial communication with male students via Telegram now, would turn against any future communication if it became official with the support of instructors or the department.

Unlike Eman, Reem was not a fan of the male-female students communication, and thus she couldn't think of a plan to enhance that communication. However, she had a suggestion that could loosen some of the conservatism of the Saudi society: creating students' association as a choice for communication. Reem said "society might accept a students' bond more than free communication." I was surprised that Reem suggested this idea as a potential method to get society's approval on the female and male students' communication. Honestly, I do not see it as effective as Reem claimed it to be, simply because it would get very controversial very quickly; therefore, many would be suspicious of it and reject it all together. Plus, the way Reem described it suggested that it would be through official outlets through the department of the university, but I do not see this happening because of the headache it might bring to officials for the same reason I mentioned above.



Like Reem, Badriah saw the reason for the weak communication with male students as “social customs and traditions” adding “if [a female] is speaking to a guy, [she] is doing something wrong”. The view that Badriah brought here is not necessarily shared by everyone, as many people do not carry the same mentality for opposite sex interaction. However, what can be added here is that initiating a conversation is not preferred to be done by the female, as it is a sign of a female’s modesty. Badriah indicated that as a female, she sees the rejection for communication with male students comes from the families of the majority of female students, but not the students themselves. Badriah mentioned how the husbands of some married female students also reject mixed communication, due to unjustified jealousy. Badriah described these rejecting perspectives as “irrelevant” since the environment it addresses is “educational.” Badriah pointed out different examples to facilitating communication with the male students under the educational umbrella, such as having an interactive website that brings the two together, establishing mixed educational workshops, and mixed courses. There is a reference that such examples would establish professional interaction between the two branches.

The male students had similar opinions to the female students. Khaled attributed the lack of communication between female and male students and the two sections to two main reasons, “the culture and religion.” When asked how the higher education environment differed from the outside world, where some form of communication happens even though culture and religion are still a factor outside of classes, he replied “maybe the work circumstances differ from the college circumstances, I don’t know.” Khaled’s indefinite answer here shows that there is some lack of clarity in why the inside of the class is different from the outside. However, Khaled was clear that no matter where the interaction with females happens, it always needs to be formal and respectful.

In the same way, Abdelaziz spoke about the reasons for the lack of communication with the opposite section. The first is obvious, which is being physically apart from each other in separate buildings. The second is “the culture” which “plays a huge rule for sure” because it imposes the separation on female and male generally. Abdelaziz was honest in saying that he doesn’t think that the separation would end anytime soon, because “cultural and religious barriers prevent this.” He added that local people in Taif “have a barrier to accept change,” meaning that they might be reluctant to change compared to other larger cities in Saudi Arabia.<sup>21</sup>

### **Mixed communication in light of honor and shame**

One of the reasons for not having communication with the opposite sex students, is the inability to understand how this type of communication could occur. Eman indicated that many students, females and males, are “ignorant” about differentiating between what constitutes forbidden communication between the sexes and what does not. She said “many see [the communication between a male and a female] as vice and forbidden, even if it was within study or work limits.” Eman mentioned an interesting reason here because she is referring indirectly to the idea of honor and shame. Originally, the lack of communication between men and women is socially accepted, and in fact many times expected, due to the inherent belief that any form of mingling would lead to vice, and thus bring shame to an individual’s reputation. Obviously, like in many places around the world, females would take the heavier blame and would be the one scrutinized the most.

The idea of honor and shame is greatly tied to the Arabian culture, and it was widely discussed within the frame of “honor killing” which is defined by Lama Abu Odeh (2010) as,

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<sup>21</sup> Taif is considered a relatively smaller town, and people living there are still attached to the customs and traditions while many are very religious, so mixing with the opposite sex is considered “Haram” or forbidden.

“the killing of a woman by her father or brother for engaging in, or being suspected of engaging in, sexual practices before or outside of marriage.” (p.911) Abu Odeh (2010) considered honor killing as a product of “the honor / shame social system.” (p.916) Which means that the idea of honor and shame is larger than what it is often being discussed. The principle of “El-Aib العيب” or shame, is tied to daily life, and it is not an idea exclusive to women, but it includes men as well in the Arab world. Although honor and shame affect both men and women, this fact is often being overlooked. According to Roland Muller (2000), “Many western nations ... have cultures that contain mostly guilt-based cultural characteristics. On the other hand, much of the Middle East and Asia is made up shame-based cultures.” He describes shame and the fear of shame that he encountered in the Arab world as “controlling forces in people’s lives.” This means that shame governs men’s and women’s daily life due to the social standards and roles set for them to follow and not break. For example, men are expected to take care of their families financially while women are expected to take care of their families emotionally.<sup>22</sup>

Although these expectations might seem traditional expectations of men and women shared in many places in the world, I believe it is a little more intense in most Arab countries, even though examples that contradict these expectations are plenty. These expectations are more intense in the Arab world because of the view of the “Arab-Orientals” that has been commonly taught and stressed in the west. Said (1979) describes this view as, “on the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things.” (p.49) Unfortunately, this savage image of the Arabs did not only

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<sup>22</sup> Stories of women who proved they can provide financial as well as emotional support for their families and men in their lives is present in Riyadh newspaper article written by Norah Alatawi (2011). The article calls for “the patriarchal society to stop the marginalization policy” because “a woman has a vital and important role” within her family and community. <https://www.alriyadh.com/636173>

influence how the west see the Arabs, but also how the Arabs see themselves. This is an argument that needs to be included. Although the west is gradually abandoning this view of the Arabs, unfortunately many of the Arab public is adopting it in the way their culture is practiced, one of which is the expectations and roles of men and women.

Alwedinani (2016) explains that just like other Arab societies, the Saudi society “has its culturally specific gender ideology, which shapes power relations and the roles of men and women”; therefore, “Saudi men and women are socially and culturally expected to act and behave in certain ways that fit the Saudi social and cultural norms.” (p.33) The intensity of these expectations applies pressure on men as much as women to meet the social standards and roles; otherwise, they would be labeled shameful. Muller (2000) writes about his experience with shame and honor in daily life in the Arab world saying:

Everywhere I moved in the Middle Eastern culture there were things that pointed to honor or shame. What chair I chose to sit in, who entered the door first, the way I expressed myself in Arabic, the very way I walked and held myself, all communicated to others around me ‘my place’ in the world. The cultures of the Middle East are filled with thousands of tiny nuances that communicate messages about shame and honor.

Another description of honor in the Arab world was brought by Richard Patai (2002), who described it as “a generic concept which embraces many different forms.” Although I disagree with Patai’s stereotypical, misleading, and sometimes even offensive investigation of how the Arabs behave, I agree with his description of the different forms of honor that takes place in the Arab world, especially his description of hospitality in the Bedouin life. Patai (2002) says:

Whether among nomads or settled people, hospitality is organically tied to honor, or, better, to the concept of “face.” By practicing hospitality lavishly, one “whitens” one’s “face,” that is, increases one’s reputation; contrarywise, a show of inhospitality can blacken one’s face. If a visitor is not received hospitably, the failure reflects on the entire tribe or village and blemishes its reputation. Therefore, compliance with the noble custom of hospitality is motivated not only by the desire of the individual host to “whiten his face,” but also by pressure to uphold the reputation of the larger social aggregate of which he and his family form part. (p.91)

This idea of whitening someone’s face applies to many aspects of a man’s or a woman’s life. If we think about it in terms of what Eman mentioned above, being in communication with the opposite sex could “blacken a student face.” This suggests that both female and male students believe that communication might lead them to lose their honor, so they hypothetically avoid the communication. However, let us not forget that many of them are already engaging in communication with the opposite sex when it is “unofficial communication” and nobody really knows who they are. Nevertheless, if the communication became “official” and with support of their instructors, many students would also turn against it just like the families, since they still carry the inherited belief that even for professional reasons, men and women should not be talking to each other. The reason for students becoming against communication with the opposite sex is because they do not want to be seen as being part of it by those around them, simply because they don’t want to be judged as atypical.

Eman confirmed that to think of the communication with the opposite sex as **باب ولازم** (a door that needs to be shut) is a very outdated concept that not many young people adopt.

She explained how many people have progressed in accepting professional relationships between the sexes, which was not accepted by many in the past. Eman gave an example of a hypothetical situation where she can be honest with her family about contacting a male student for school purposes, such as getting papers or getting a book, etc. And that her family, especially her brother, would not mind helping her to get the things she needs from that male student. This level of trust and honesty that Eman described here is different than when I was a student because at that time not many females could be honest with their families about similar communication. Eman continued saying, “we became more conscious and open-minded society,” even if not everyone is on board still.

### **Online communication is the best method for being mixed**

When Eman was asked about her opinion on how to enhance the communication of female and male students, she thought that establishing communication should be done through instructors and that they could “gather [female and male students] in one group.” According to her, the reason for communication under the instructors’ observation is to ensure the exchange of useful explanation of unclear information, and to guarantee that communication would “not cross respect limits.” In other words, the observation of instructors would ensure both that students stay on topic and exchange information in a professional and respectful manner. This would be successful for students taking the same course with mutual instructors who would create a formal chatting group on a chatting app and add female and male students to it.

Beyond using social media platforms, Eman spoke about an idea that she feels would benefit both female and male students majoring in English, and she wished the department or instructors thought of it before. Her idea is “create[ing] a library for all students’ materials, so female and male students from following years can find it.” If students’ work such as “answers

to questions, or quizzes, or even materials the students found on the net” were collected and saved in a specific library, it would provide the support that many students need. Eman continued “it would be a one place reference, a platform that would benefit English major students” confirming that “it targets first year students, as well as whoever need expertise or advice from students in the major.” Eman’s idea sounds exactly like a typical university library website here in the US.

Eman wanted to see a specific and local platform that would only serve English majors in the Foreign Language department at Taif University. Also, she is suggesting that the platform would collect work of previous female and male students who might have taken the same courses and the same assignments, but probably with different levels of accessibility to materials depending on the instructor. Moreover, Eman shared that from her experience, female students are hard workers because they make effort in exceeding what is given to them by helping clarify the materials. Female students “collect questions or files, gather fundamental information, and create conceptual maps.”

To have a formal communication with male students. Sarah wished that university classes be mixed, especially in majors that requires the mix, such as English or medicine. However, a more feasible idea that Sarah brought is establishing “experimental classes” every semester that might benefit the communication between the two branches. The idea is that these classes have a mix of female and male students being taught in a mixed environment. The results of this experiment should conclude whether or not students accept the situation. Another idea that Sarah thought would gradually facilitate communication with the male branch is doing a live broadcast of a class taking place in a male section and showing it on a big projector screen to the female section. This way a single instructor teaches the same class at the same

time, but for a male section and a female section.

When Sarah was asked about the role of online platforms in facilitating the communication between the two branches, and her opinion about the department establishing a formal group chat between students, she saw it as useful informal tools for the students. She indicated that the privacy that such apps provide helps students to be honest about their opinions of courses and instructors, “we can say don’t take this professor’s course, or take it”. However, if it was created by the department, then students would participate with their real names and so it would be impossible for them to share their honest opinions about classes or instructors.

It seems that most male students preferred interaction or communication to happen online rather than in-person. When I asked Khaled about what he suggests to improve female and male communication, he responded that if there was a link or a chatting group between sections, this would benefit both because they can exchange information with the other. Khaled’s idea is supported by Abdelaziz, who referred to the Telegram chatting group as a great way to communicate with female students and “to exchange and summarize materials and discuss with each other classes.” He viewed apps like Telegram and WhatsApp as great methods that could help establish formal communications with the opposite branch if desired.

Although Faisal was on the same page as Abdelaziz about when separation in higher education would end, he indicated that having “something like a website or an app” would be good to bring the two sections together and allow better information and knowledge exchange. However, he made a point that facilitating better communication with the female section needs to be done through administration, not the students, because students alone don’t have any power over this matter.



The view that Faisal had about having administration operate online communication with the female students was not supported by another male participant who was in favor of online communication. Ahmed indicated that “having a formal type of communication is not necessary” because “[Saudis] are conservative” justifying why casual online communication over official online communication would be the best choice. What Ahmed meant here is that since society is conservative having a formal online platform created and run by the department would not be successful. Ahmed explained how in a formal online platform students’ full names will be shown, which is something he felt many female students might not feel comfortable with sharing their names and participating when everyone knows their real identity. And when I asked him about male students Ahmed said, “male students wouldn't care”.

The ideology behind what Ahmed described above is one of the most complex ideologies common in the Saudi society. Since many women wear “the Niqab” in society outside of female environments, nobody really knows their identity because it is protected by the veil that cover their faces. Nowadays many women wear it not because it is a religious teaching, but because it is a cultural custom. This identity cover has reflected back on the majority of women and made them feel uncomfortable sharing their pictures, and for some even sharing their names. It became a trait of the Saudi society that women enjoy privacy everywhere they go.

Ahmed thought that continuing communication through Telegram would “give students freedom” in what they share or say in the group without observation or scrutiny from instructors, and therefore avoiding problems with instructors. As indicated earlier, Ahmed thought that the Telegram communication with female students was established as a result of

the COVID-19 pandemic, where in reality it was there before the pandemic started. However, the pandemic could have made this method popular among students because it created a need for the communication between female and male students since it is uncertain new situation. With that being said, Ahmed believed that electronic methods are “the best solution” to have an effective communication with the opposite sex without jeopardizing culture nor religion.

### **Separated vs. Mixed Classes**

In this section, participants are asked to comment on the advantages and disadvantages of separated classes from their own experience, since all participants have spent their official education in these types of classes. Then, participants are asked to think of a hypothetical situation where female and male students study in mixed classes. Through this hypothesis, participants anticipate the advantages and disadvantages of those type of classes. For example, one of the advantages of mixed classes that participants mentioned, especially females, is that mixed classes are like “a practice field” for them to communicate effectively with the opposite sex in preparation for communication in other aspects of life. This means that most participants see the mixed classes as a chance to discover how the opposite sex thinks and explore new ways of thinking that are unusual for them.

An important point to mention here which is that the rejection of mixed classes comes from not just the students’ parents, but from the students’ families at large, meaning that grandparents or siblings or even uncles have a saying in this too. This is not surprising, because most Arab families have the same structure where the decision on certain sensitive issues is collective. This is driven from the traditional Arabian tribal life where being part of the group is essential in one’s life. Patai (2002) described how there is a strong relation between the behavior of Arab tribal members and their connection to the tribe saying, “there is a strong correlation

between honor and group survival. Honorable behavior is that which is conducive to group cohesion and group survival, that which strengthens the group and serves its interests; while shameful behavior is that which tends to disrupt, endanger, impair, or weaken the social aggregate.” (pp.95-96) in conclusion, the way I organized the following section depends on highlighting the participants opinions of mixed classes, indicating who is in favor of it and who is against it and who is undecided. The advantages and disadvantages of separated and mixed classes are discussed within each opinion section.

### **In favor of mixed classes**

Badriah referred to the 2030 vision, saying that it is establishing “a new age” for the young, that men and women are already experiencing increased professional mixed work environments, and more than likely it is going to increase in the future. Therefore, she emphasized that since females do not know how to talk to males in professional settings, they should practice this when getting higher education to prepare them for the future. There is an indication here that higher education is the first step to establishing one's professional life and so interacting with the opposite sex often in college, should prepare the youth for similar environments when they graduate. This is something that Badriah has experienced, as she attended mixed courses in her current job.

Although she has been in separated classes all her life, she is not against mixed ones. Badriah supported mixed classes as she viewed them as “increasing awareness” of how to communicate with the opposite sex, and she viewed them as “helping accept the idea of being mixed anywhere.” So in Badriah’s opinion, mixed classes help both females and males become familiar with being mixed everywhere and accepting it without giving thought to any negative outcome. Also, Badriah saw these classes as a chance for female and male students to show a combined creativity which would improve higher education in the end. This means having

varied perspectives would increase the quality and variation of knowledge learned in these classes.

For the disadvantages of mixed classes, Badriah saw “sexual harassment” as highly predicted. According to her, females are annoyed by harassment and negative behaviors that happen now in current mixed environments such as mixed work environment. Badriah believed that these negative actions happen because both females and males are not used to communicating with each other, and as a result many reject mixing. Badriah agreed with other female participants in highlighting society’s “customs and traditions” as the reason for the appearance of disadvantages, and predicted the females’ families as preventing them from mixed education. She mentioned that the same education denial might happen to some male students as well, but it would be more common for females. Badriah used an interesting popular saying in the middle east: الولد شايلى عيبه that literally translates to "a boy carries his fault," which means that the faults or mistakes of men are not seen or known by society because they affect them alone and nobody else. Whereas for women, their faults or mistakes affect their whole families and tribes because it’s shameful and can be seen or known.

Regardless of the disadvantages that Badriah saw as a possible negative outcome of mixed classes, she only saw the positives in English mixed classes, specifically the academic research course. She viewed the hypothetical mixed English classes as fun and a place to “exchange ideas.” On top of that, she saw the possibility of “improvement of techniques and activities in class,” predicting active writing practice in as a possible change in mixed classes. Badriah even thought of the class as the best place to witness an enjoyable class competition between females and males. She mentioned how currently in all-female courses, many female competitions are based on being jealous of each other, which she predicted in mixed classes to

fade away and to be replaced with honor and less intensity.

Badriah was sure in emphasizing that her shallow experience in mixed education does not give her an advantage in speaking about the benefits or shortages of such classes, so she can only predict about those classes. However, her long experience with separated education allows her to highlight its pros and cons. Badriah viewed separated sex classes as “more comfortable,” allowing female students to be “expressive” since all those around her are females, so in a sense she does not need to keep her modesty, and this gives her a slightly comforting feeling. Moreover, Badriah took the fact that all those around her are females as an advantage because females would understand her better and would get the meaning behind what she says even if she is not clear. With that, Badriah saw “similar perspectives of students” as a disadvantage of separated classes and that there is “a need” for hearing someone with “a different perspective” which is not found in separated classes.

Focusing on presumed advantages of mixed classes, Eman thought that a mixed class would be “fun!” and when she was asked why, she replied “I can hear different opinions than usual since we are all women, sometimes we have similar opinions, we do not hear men's opinion about anything,” adding, “if academic research class is mixed, it will be better” justifying that “if [students] discussed a topic [female students] don't have enough information about, [male students] would give us their experiences and opinions, so we do not go back home and ask our family, we would have a class discussion and be done with it”. An example of a topic that female students might be unfamiliar with is “car accidents” as Eman indicated, “females don't have experience handling it” since females were only recently allowed to drive. Moreover, the discussion about these topics and the exchange of “rich information,” as Eman calls it, could lead to “much more heated arguments” between the two because of the vast life

experiences and differing points of view.

It is intriguing how Eman chose to speak about females' ignorance of certain topics, and not counter wise. Also, she described females as "going back home and asking their family" about unfamiliar topics, which is gratifying because it confirms the curiosity of females to learn, but at the same time annoying because it shows their dependence on family's explanation. However, what is worth the attention here is how mixed class discussions could potentially enrich the knowledge of both female and male students through exploring the world from the opposite sex standpoint, through their unique opinions and points of view. This is a very powerful reason to consider if discussion about the format of educational classes begins.

Adding to the advantages of mixed classes, that Badriah mentioned earlier, Eman said that in mixed classes female students would learn more accurate accent pronunciation. Eman believed that male students are better in pronunciation. Eman mentioned an app called "Hello Talk" which is basically an audio chatting platform that offers online courses with native speakers. She said Saudi males had better accent than Saudi females in that app, specifically "British" accent, so that made her come to the assumption that in general male students have better accents than female students. However, Eman justified why she thinks this is the case, basically because females, unlike males, do not have much time on their hands to practice their accent or pronunciation. Eman specifically gave examples of the kinds of things she would be busy with, unlike a man. Eman explained, "as a woman, I have work and more things that keep me busy, I have house chores like laundry and such, so I might say 'I don't have time to learn.'"

Eman described how she imagines her reaction when first starting at a mixed class "I'll be terrified" she said "awkward and embarrassing situations could happen, you could say something that everyone understands wrongly, and put yourself in an embarrassing situation in

front of everyone.” However, Eman changed her voice tone to a more relaxed one, and assured herself that if it happens, it is normal, saying “these [situations] are all part of social life regardless of the society or the situation mixed or not,” indicating that embarrassing social situations happen in all societies and it is part of creating a society. Eman addressed the elephant in the room by talking about possible sexual harassment because of mixed classes, and emphasized that the Saudi society is unlike other nearby countries (Gulf countries like Kuwait, UAE, etc.) where higher education is mostly mixed and they are “open-minded” while we are “closed-minded.”

Therefore, the idea of mixed classes, if applied, will be considered as “a shock” to many people who might need “fifteen more years to accept such a thought.” Eman remembered the time when the Ministry of Education started an experiment of merging elementary school boys and girls together, and many families threatened to withdraw their daughters from schools. She said that with higher education the situation could be worse because of “the age influence” of students. While Eman is aware of the potential consequences of mixed classes, she is also aware that the young students’ generation is “different” from their old parents’ generation, where the former “accepts change” and the latter does not. It seems like the rejection of mixed classes is hard to tolerate by the parents’ generation because it is abnormal and contradicts what they take as for granted, the prohibition of being around the opposite sex.

Moreover, Eman envisioned what could happen negatively with mixed classes, indicating that sexual harassment and even assault could come from “street boys”,<sup>23</sup> who still live among us, whom she identified as disrespectful and uneducated. However, she recognized

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<sup>23</sup> “Street boys” is a well-known expression used in the Arab world to refer anyone who doesn’t behave well or doesn’t have respect for others, someone who have savage manners. It can be used for the two sexes, but there is also another feminine expression called “street girls” to refer to females.

that “there are boys who are respectful and polite” who would make the experience enjoyable and enlightening. Those bad examples of males could be the reason many families would prevent their college-age females from going to the university. Eman anticipated that many families would not allow their female members to go to higher education institutions saying, “many girls would be denied education; my oldest brother would deny his daughter education, he would say ‘she does not need to go, she is already literate’.” Here, Eman predicted a confrontation with her oldest brother about his daughter going to a mixed university or class, “he would not allow her to go and study,” she said. And even if others told him that by not letting her go, he is “denying his daughter higher education,” he would reply “she doesn’t need to go, she’s already literate.” Then if her brother was faced with the importance of his daughter getting a degree or the importance of her securing a job in the future, he would say, “he is there to provide for her and the family.”

Eventually, Eman sums up the disadvantages of mixed classes by explaining how it is important to be aware of people’s reaction to this step, and that it cannot be done unless society is aware of it, so people would accept it and “nobody would be denied education” because of it. Plus, Eman suggested proposing being in a mixed class as a choice not an obligation, keeping in consideration how others would react or think because “some people are religious, and this should be in mind.” For those choosing mixed classes, imposing rules “to reserve the rights of others” is a must, so everyone can live in harmony.

Commenting on the advantage of separated classes, Eman indicated “concentration” as the main advantage. Eman elaborated that “there is no chaos in the class, boys are always chaotic, even in elementary or middle school boys are always chaotic and noisy. Girls quickly become disciplined way faster than boys.” Eman emphasized that because female students are



quickly disciplined, “time is saved for class activities” which apparently something she does not anticipate happening in the male section, or even in the possible mixed classes. The image of students that Eman portrayed here represents a stereotypical view of female and male behavior, where the girls are quieter and more likely to follow the rules than boys. I believe what she described is not entirely false or should be rejected, as it bears a partial reflection of reality that I have experienced myself teaching in a mixed class in the US, but generalizing it is problematic. Plus, given the fact that there is a barrier that limits communication between the sexes already imbedded in the culture might affect the behavior of both. So it is hard to predict how female and male students would act if they are in mixed classes. With that being said, Eman did not think that mixed classes would influence her learning of English in any way saying, “mixed gender class or not, I will learn,” which suggests her determination to fulfill the goal of acquiring the language no matter what the environment is.

Switching to the disadvantages of separated classes, Eman thought inexperience in communicating and interacting with men as a point of concern. She referred to a study that she read about divorce numbers in the west. According to Eman, the article claims that divorce rates in the west are less than the east. The reason in her opinion is that “people are in contact with the opposite sex since they are children” and that they deal with each other all the time, which is unlike communication in the Saudi culture. I don’t know how accurate this study is; however, it is no secret that divorce rates in Saudi Arabia have skyrocketed more than ever before, and that divorce is more accepted in society than ever before. Eman illustrated that Saudi women have “less experience” in dealing with men<sup>24</sup>, saying; “not all girls have brothers,

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<sup>24</sup> Since Saudi Arabia is a Muslim country and the majority of Saudis are Muslims, premarital relationships are generally rejected because it could lead to fornication which is strictly forbidden in Islam.

so when she's married it is hard<sup>25</sup>. Many might say “he is not like my dad, well, nobody is going to be like your dad! It is different.” Eman is acknowledging that not all females know how to talk or act in the presence of males, and I can imagine that the opposite is true. In separated classrooms, Eman saw her experience as dealing with “one personality” in the class, while she described mixed classes as a place to “deal with more than one personality,” which as she said is “good for the future” when girls get married and do not know how their husband's personality would be. Eman’s indication that all females have similar mindsets and reactions to things is another form of stereotyping that Eman once again falls into. She does not just see the inexperience of dealing with males as a disadvantage of the separated classes, but also, she sees it as “a disadvantage of the conservative society.”

Moving away from Eman’s opinions about mixed and separated classes, Sarah saw “freedom to speak” as an advantage of separated classes. “We can express ourselves more freely in separated classes, whereas in mixed classes it would be impossible to do that.” Sarah imagined mixed classes as creating an uncomfortable environment or situation to both female and male students where they will all have difficulty in communication, saying, “if someone talked, it will be strange” and that all students will start to “pretend” in the way they speak or act because “they never experienced a situation like this before.” Sarah adds to that last point of pretending to be something you’re not, saying that she likes to be herself in classes, in the way she speaks or acts. According to her, this manner of being herself would allow her to ask her teachers anything she needs<sup>26</sup>, while guaranteeing that they would be sympathetic towards her. This manner would be inappropriate in a mixed class since she will maintain her modesty and

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<sup>25</sup> The participant’s elaboration on marriage here deals with the situation where the male and the female do not choose their partner or do not know him. (a form of prearranged marriage)

<sup>26</sup> What I believe Sarah is referring to here is being friendly or joking with instructors while asking them class-related requests such as, changes in grades, or deadline extensions, or bonus inquiries.

her behaviors might be interpreted wrongly.

Reflecting on the world she experiences behind the university gates, Sarah said, “I’m separated from men in the university only, but not in the outside world.” She indicates that she has the freedom to communicate with them anywhere, so being separated from them inside the university did not really affect her ability communicating with them. What Sarah saw as a disadvantage of separated classes is the lack of sympathy from her female instructors towards them as female students. She imagined that male instructors are sympathetic and fair towards their male students when it comes to course content or grading. I assume that this image that Sarah has is based on her individual experience with female led classes versus male led classrooms. However, I imagine it reflects the experiences of many other female students too, since male instructors’ tolerance and flexibility has been confirmed and established by most female participants in this study.

Sarah liked the idea of mixed classes in higher education, but it needs to be done “with boundaries”; as she indicated, “it’s impossible to put male students chairs next to female chairs and ask them to mix all of a sudden.” She thought that the mix needs to be done “gradually” and not all at once. Plus, it needs to be operated with observation and monitoring of students from student and faculty alike, since “not all [students] are good people, nor all of them are bad”. When Sarah was asked what she feels should be monitored, she replied, “the way we dress” or “clothing.” According to her, it would be impossible for women to “wear what they want” just like what they wear to the university currently. I believe she meant wearing modestly including wearing long Abayas<sup>27</sup> and hijab. Sarah thought that having “a universal uniform for everyone” to wear or “setting certain rules and restrictions” to what students can wear could be

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<sup>27</sup> Abayas are a type of garment that resemble maxi robes. it is popular among Muslim women all around the globe, especially in the region of gulf countries. The Abaya can be of any color, but the most common color is black.

solutions to the clothing issue. Also, Sarah indicated that awareness of proper communication with the opposite sex should be promoted among female and male students because if there was no awareness of the limits, the situation could turn into a chance for romantic or personal relationships, or even harassment from both.

Moreover, when Sarah was asked whether being in mixed classes has any influence over learning English or English writing, Sarah believed that nothing would be different from separated classes because the syllabus and course content would be similar in any class format. According to her, knowledge of English would not increase or change because of English mixed classes, and the only knowledge difference she expects coming from mixed classes is knowledge of how to communicate with men. She said, “until now, when I see how some of my friends communicate with men, I feel as if [men] are something strange or coming from space, not like they live with us on earth and in every house.” Sarah indicated that the communication with men is a must because usually the only time women communicate with men naturally is when they get engaged or married.

According to Sarah, communicating with men still does not feel like normal communication even though it is part of humanity, so this type of communication needs to be normalized and not framed within personal or romantic communications. She clarified, “when a girl speaks to a guy, she immediately thinks that he might be attracted to her, and vice versa, while this communication is normal, and it occurs among all humans.” Finally, Sarah anticipated that the only disadvantage of mixed classes is attending classes just to find romantic relationships or to draw the attention of the opposite sex, not coming to get education.

Switching to the male participants view about mixed classes, only one seemed in favor of them. Abdelaziz, indicated that he has been in separated classes for all his life, and that he never

thought of why female and male students are separated because it is taken for granted due to “religious and cultural barriers.” Abdelaziz saw that these barriers differentiate the Saudi society from societies in neighboring countries that don’t have such barriers. However, when asking Abdelaziz about the advantages of being in separated classes, he mentioned one advantage which is “not many distractions” in class. He responded that “the presence of girls might cause distraction in the mind,” adding, “at the end they are the opposite sex and that's attractive.” Abdelaziz believed that to overcome this highly possible distraction, strict rules need to be in place to maintain discipline in class. Switching to disadvantages of separated classes, Abdelaziz noted that separate classes have low numbers of students, which means “less enthusiasm and participation” in class. In mixed classes, the presence of females would create a more energetic and enthusiastic class environment because the total number of students will be higher.

The previous point can be considered as an advantage of mixed classes as Abdelaziz switched the conversation to believing that “the excitement in interaction and the change in the situation” could create a positive class environment. However, the disadvantages of mixed classes could be students having difficulties communicating properly in the beginning of switching to mixed classes because “both have never been in a situation like this before.” Finally, Abdelaziz commented that there are no significant “learning outcomes” from being separated or mixed, and that “it is the same in any class format.” Abdelaziz was mostly focused on oral communication in his answers to the questions focusing on the advantages and disadvantages of mixed and separated classes, so I had to specifically ask him about writing communication and whether there are any differences there. He replied that writing mixed classes would still be the same as now, no obvious difference would happen because the communication and interaction is less occurring. When talking about possibility of being the

instructor of a mixed class, Abdelaziz believed that he would focus on engaging students in class discussions and group assignments, so they get used to participating in the new class format. Also, he realized that it might be a challenge to get answers from students since they might be shy at the beginning.

From there the conversation switched to how far the idea of mixed classes is from reality. Abdelaziz thought that “it is far” from becoming a reality due to people not accepting it because they view sex separation as stemming from Islam more than the culture. I sensed that Abdelaziz was in favor of the mixed classes, because he added that “it is not a cultural thing because you can study with girls no problem at all.” From this response, he was referring to the separation as being part of the religion, which is a belief most Saudis still carry today because of the past influence of religious hardliners on the society.

When Abdelaziz was asked who rejects mixed education more, the students or their families (the young generation or the older generation), he answered, “both reject the idea,” elaborating, “[female students] might not accept the situation and might not be comfortable. Plus, their parents would view this as a negative situation because they don't want their daughters to mix with [male students].” This response by Abdelaziz was interesting because he anticipated female students being the shy and uncomfortable ones, but not male students. It is hard to agree with Abdulaziz on this because it is highly possible that both men and women would show discomfort if they became part of mixed classes. Also, despite what Abdelaziz thought, from this research it seemed that men are the one against mixed classes and the ones uncomfortable to be part of them. This is expected result as men don't see the personal nor the social benefits of communicating with women and they focus mostly on the negatives. This is unlike the opinions of most of the females who saw benefit in this type of communication.

## **Against mixed classes**

A female student, Reem, saw the rejection of mixed classes as not coming from the students saying, “our generation would not reject something like this” and that “the rejection for mixed classes is from families.” However, with that affirmation, Reem shared how she does not wish for anything like mixed classes to happen because there is “no benefit in it and no useful reason to do it.” She described the idea as “invalid” and “only adding to temptation to do sins.” Reem even imagined classes shifting from their educational purposes to virtue checking purposes by “focusing on the reputation of female and male students.” Obviously, Reem is sensitive to the society’s needs when it comes to mixed classes, because she foreshadowed the focus on the reputation of students as the main challenge facing mixed classes. Because families would care about their sons’ and daughters’ reputations, specifically their daughters’ reputation. Therefore, officials need to make clear for families and for society in general, that mixed classes is just part of education and nothing has changed. The focus should be on highlighting the benefits of being in such classes.

Reem is against mixed-sex classes, even though she has experienced mixed classes before. She described her two months of intensive English studying in Malaysia as “weird, interesting, different, and enjoyable” and that “the class discussions were not boring.” However, even though she enjoyed that brief experience in Malaysia, she rejected the idea of being in a mixed class, saying, “إبعد عن الشر و غنيله” which is an Arabic proverb that literally translates to "walk away from evil while singing to it." This means stay away from evil or danger as much as you can. Reem mentioned how the idea of mixed classes itself brought a negative energy to her mind when she thought of it the first time, mainly because it is a new and unusual idea. Like Eman, Reem predicted the female students’ families getting involved in mixed-sex classes if it

became a reality. She predicted families stopping their female members from going to the university again, or even worse, fathers accompanying their daughters to the university every day, which I see as an exaggeration of the situation.

While Reem was not in favor of mixed classes, she was realistic with her judgment because she mentioned that it is an “unpredictable” situation because it’s new, and that “people should wait and see.” She even compared it to the driving of women: when it first was announced that it will be permitted, many people rejected it and some were fiercely against it, but now the majority of people accept it and are in fact teaching the females in their family how to drive, or even buying them cars. Reem indicated that “our society completely changed from seven years ago”; therefore, it is hard to tell if the families’ reactions that Eman or Reem or other participants mentioned are going to reflect reality. Society might reject the mixed classes first, then get accustomed to them, and accept them after all.

With this positive thinking about mixed classes, I asked Reem about the advantages she envisions in hypothetical mixed classes, particularly the academic research course. Her answer was “in writing mixed classes there might be more support and help, female and male students might cooperate” and that there would not be any “boredom” in class, which is an aspect of some current classes that some participants referred to in chapter 4. Despite these advantages, Reem saw “chaos” as a possible disadvantage, especially in the beginning of the process; however, she relies on the oldest point in the book “[students] are all adults” to predict the gradual chaos fading. Another possible disadvantage that was mentioned by other participants is the possibility of sexual harassment, but Reem thought that it would be rare. Reem listed “protecting [a female’s] faith” on top of the list for advantages for being in separated classes, which is a reference to maintaining religious faith. This comes from the believe that "ikhtilat" or mingling



between men and women is forbidden.<sup>28</sup> Another point that Reem mentioned as an advantage is “maintaining [a female’s] concentration in class”. The assumption here is that being around the opposite sex might be distracting to both. Although Reem saw many advantages for being in a separated class, she did not see a disadvantage for it.

One of the strong voices against mixed classes in this project is Abeer is. As indicated earlier, she rejected the idea all together from the beginning seeing “no benefit nor interest” in communicating with male students. She was very direct and strong in pointing out how male students would only want to benefit from female students describing them as “reckless, impolite, cheaters, and indiligent.” Abeer is very sure that “boys will set [female students] back academically and socially.” Abeer explained this through her view of the female students’ community at the university, indicating competition and jealousy as the fuel for the female communication, and that they have learned to operate in this system, but if male students came to the picture, they would change the whole system and ruin it for the females. “In the female community, female students challenge each other, they are jealous from each other's performance, and there is competition between them. Male students would ruin this system all together” adding “female competition is positive as long as it is honest.” The opinion that Abeer carried about male students seems to be based on a personal experience as she referred to her family as having “a single good male” while the rest are “stupid and reckless.” I wonder if Abeer always carried such opinions or if she was upset about something in particular right before the interview.

Abeer’s experience with separated classes made her see no distraction happening since she has been in them her entire life. She believed that in those classes she is understood and

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<sup>28</sup> In Islam “Ikhyilat” or mingling between men and women is forbidden when they are alone. Many Muslims do not consider Ikhtilat as forbidden when it is done in groups or in large public spaces.

encouraged since “it’s all girls,” continuing, “if I have an assignment or presentation everyone would help.” The help that Abeer is referring to here comes from her colleagues if she needed consultation or had questions about something. She did not imagine that she would be getting the same type of help from male students if they studied in mixed classes. Abeer claimed that male students are going to ask about the course more than female students, which results in a distraction for her and other female students. When asked specifically about the possibility of the academic research course being mixed, Abeer indicated that such class will be “chaotic,” adding “we wouldn’t know who to look at—the instructor or male students.” In this sense, having male students in a writing class not only is going to be a distraction for female students, but it will prevent them from learning English writing.

However, it is fair to say that Abeer did not just see the disadvantages of mixed classes, she saw couple possible advantages for it as well. One important point is that it is a chance for females to be “bolder” when communicating with males in the outside world. This is an indication to how the Saudi society is different in the sense of how many Saudi females are not used to being around strange men who are not part of their families. Abeer specifically referred to her personal experience when being in the presence of “a foreign man<sup>29</sup>” as she indicated that it is “a struggle” for her “communicating with foreign men” outside at a store or any other public space. Another possible advantage of mixed classes that Abeer saw, even though she rejects mixed classes, is “the influence” of female students’ presence on male students’ intelligence. “Women are more hard-working than men, they could influence men to become like them” Abeer said. Although she admitted that the opposite could happen, and male students could negatively influence female students’ performance to become careless.

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<sup>29</sup> Foreign man here does not mean a man from a different country, it means a man who is a stranger to a woman, even if she knows who he is, he is still considered stranger or foreigner since he is not part of her family.

With this, Abeer goes back to her rejection of mixed classes, emphasizing how the Saudi society is “different,” an implication that many will not accept the mixed classes situation. Things could only change “if the society changed” or “the way of thinking changed.” Abeer went into details about how “there are still men who think about women badly,” adding, “if they were approached by a woman who might be just asking about anything, those men immediately think sexually.” Abeer boldly and directly expressed her disapproval of mixed-sex classes mainly because of “the way of thinking that men have” as she claimed. That way of thinking is “backward and savage,” saying, “if men continue to think the same way, we will not progress.” What I should say here is that Abeer seemed to have a preconceived assumption about all men as thinking this way, even if she does not generalize all the time.

Although Abeer was direct in voicing her rejection for mixed classes, she was also direct in mentioning how she cannot judge the situation in those classes because she has not experienced them before. Therefore, when she was asked about the disadvantages of those classes, she didn't point any, and when asked about the possibility of increased sexual harassment in specific, she indicated that “harassment could happen anywhere,” but more likely outside the classroom, then inside it. Abeer justified this with the presence of the instructor and other students saying “students will be disciplined and probably away from each other in class.” Abeer ends her opinion about mixed classes by expressing her fear working in mixed environments. She referred to how unfamiliar and unusual such environments for her indicating that she will need to be trained and prepared to study or work in it, saying, “I will need to be accustomed to mixed environments because I don't know how to deal with men, I don't know how to communicate in this environment, I will make many mistakes and will doubt my answers all the time,” adding, “I will not have confidence in my work, so it will influence me negatively

because I'm not used to such environment."

Switching to the male perspective, Mohammed, had a unique perspective about separated and mixed classes. He was not 100% supportive, even though he admitted that male students would be excited about the idea. However, he emphasized that these male students would be excited about the idea for themselves, but not for the females in their families, Mohammed clarified that male students would accept the mixed class format for themselves, but they would reject it for the females in their families. When I asked whether the rejection comes from the male brothers of a female or from her parents, Mohammed said "the rejection is from the young males, not the parents," then added, "the parents want their daughter to get a degree and be done, but the male brothers are the ones who don't want this." And when I asked Mohammed for a percentage he replied, "70% of the young male generation would reject mixed classes, while 30% would accept it, since [the female student] will be in an educational place and nothing will happen to her." Moreover, Mohammed anticipated that females might not want to be in a mixed class to begin with: "girls might be the one rejecting being mixed because they might simply not want to work with guys." However, from the responses of most female participants in this project, this does not seem to be the case, as most female participants shared their excitement about this.

Thinking about some of the positive outcomes that would result from mixed classes, Mohammed thought that an improvement in "attendance, participation and even diligence" would show for most male students, while the rest might not even care whether mixed or not and will depend on their studying effort just like they do in separate classes. In addition, Mohammed anticipated that those classes could create a source of motivation for male students to improve their performance and show the opposite sex that they are better than them. Also Mohammed

gave his opinion on the disadvantages of mixed classes, he thought that it might create an environment of jealousy and embarrassment among students since it is not ordinary for them to be in such classes. "Some students might be embarrassed from sharing their grades with the whole class, especially in front of girls." Although nowadays there is an increase in awareness about how this practice is a breach of students' privacy, it is completely normal for an instructor to share students' grades publicly in front of the class. Mohammed believed that such a practice could be more embarrassing in a mixed class than it is in a separated one. Another disadvantage that Mohammed anticipated is female students "becoming jealous from each other," which I don't necessarily disagree with, but I don't agree that it is exclusive to female students as I believe both sexes could become under the influence of jealousy in this case. Furthermore, Mohammed anticipated "harassment and establishing relations with the opposite sex" among the disadvantages of mixed classes, which are already referred to by other participants.

Lastly, Mohammed indicated that learning English or English writing is not influenced by the class format whether separated or not, but rather by the instructor teaching the class. "Learning English depends on the instructor and how clear he is teaching it." Mohammed emphasized that if the instructor is clear, everyone, whether a male or a female, will understand and respond to him because the point got across to them. With that out of the way, Mohammed went back to his earlier suggestion about making students mix on Blackboard rather than mix in reality, because it appears to be the most practical option for mixing students in his opinion. However, Mohammed shared that if mixed classes were established in reality, and students were obligated to do it, then there will be no choice but to accept it.

I had to ask Mohammed what would change if female and male students had communication with each other and shared the same class, and he responded, "I don't prefer to be

physically mixed with female students in class,” and that “university students are not used to being mixed, from childhood until adulthood they are separated,” which he indicated is “unlike some elementary students nowadays [who are] already mixing, we didn't.” The difference between the university-age students and the elementary-age students that Mohammed mentioned is important to comprehend. Although the age gap between the two generations is not big, both are doing different actions when it comes to mixing with the opposite sex. What one generation views as accepted communication, the other generation views as rejected. The first is accustomed to being mixed with the opposite sex, while the latter is not. Obviously, this is not always the case, as there is an exception to every rule. Mohammed added that being part of everyday communication with females in different spaces in society is expected and slightly tolerated but having the same type of communication in educational classrooms is not, because it is received quite differently by people. Mohammed imagined that being shocked from mixing in classes might start a wave of “harassment” among students, which I believe is highly possible as well, unless it was faced with strict rules and regulations for such behaviors.

Reflecting on his experience in separated classes, Mohammed did not see any advantages in those classes as it appeared to be “the usual” for him, so he cannot point out any advantages in it since he never experienced any other class format. On the contrary to the advantages, Mohammed did see a negative side to separated classes. He talked about seeing his colleagues graduate, and others coming in and then graduate, while he is still not completing his degree as something that affected him negatively. So, he described this “change in students' faces” as a disadvantage of separated classes. What Mohammed is referring to here is how his performance and commitment to higher education are compared to those who are the same age and situation as him.

This type of comparison is highly present in any type of class and between any type of students, but I think it is possibly more intense in separated classes considering what Mohammed described. This comparison comes from two sources, one is intrinsically from the students and the way they view themselves, and the other is extrinsically from family, friends, colleagues, and instructors. Mohammed elaborated on how seeing new faces constantly in class affected him negatively, “I ask myself why I didn't follow my colleagues when I met them, and why I didn't work harder and graduate on time”. Mohammed wondered why he didn't work harder like his friends and graduate with the people he met in the beginning of his education, adding, “seeing new faces negatively affected [him].”

Faisal and Ahmed shared the same rejection of mixed classes with Mohammed. While Faisal thought more knowledge would be gained from mixed classes, he mentioned that mixed classes might not be “as serious as those in the west.” Since he experienced mixed classes abroad, Faisal thought that education in those classes was taken seriously, yet if the switch to mixed classes happen in Saudi universities, students might not take their education as seriously as they used to because of the switch. Ahmed, on the other hand, was very direct in saying that because of customs and traditions many people will reject it, especially girls. To think in place of females, Ahmed assumed that female students specifically would reject mixed classes because they would consider it as a break from customs and traditions. Then, in a move that ignores speaking about his own gender, Ahmed tried to clarify his answer more saying that the rejection for being in mixed classes would come mostly from the girls' parents and families more than the girls themselves. When asked whether or not the quality of education would change as a result of these changes in class format, Ahmed said “education would be the same no matter what,” including the writing class. Like other participants, Ahmed described the situation in mixed

classes in the beginning as being “weird”; however, he thought people would get used to it gradually. However, Ahmed mentioned, “distractions” as an disadvantage of mixed classes. Meaning that female students distracting male students and male instructors. This shows how he sees the negatives mostly coming from females.

### **Undecided**

A female participant was not quite sure about the idea of mixed classes. Leena saw that mixed classes would give students a chance to focus on each other rather than the class itself, especially male students “let’s not lie to each other, it could happen” she says. However, in a separated class students will be busy with their work or the class, as nothing is there to distract them, a reference to the opposite sex. On one hand, Leena identified separated classes as classes that meet the standard customs and traditions of the Saudi society and makes some students comfortable; on the other hand, she identified mixed classes as classes where “bad things” could happen. For example, Leena mentioned how some students might be concerned with building romantic relationships with each other more than the class itself, which in her opinion might result in a decrease in students’ academic performance in classes. Leena did not reject mixing with the opposite sex in higher education, but she sees more benefit in separation than in mixing. She saw the occasional lack of fairness that female students experience as a disadvantage of separated classes.

Thus, she saw male faculty as more fair than female faculty, and so she believed that if the two branches were mixed, female students will experience more fairness than before. Leena then explains how separation in the Saudi society is like “a second nature,” since it is practiced in the majority of daily of life. She spoke about how the majority of Saudis grew up with separation in education, so it doesn't feel unnatural to her nor to the vast majority of students. For this tight



relation of separation to the society, Leena believed that separation is taken for granted and it is something that reoccurs constantly since most Saudis became aware of life, so it's not something that can be changed or questioned. However, Leena did not ignore the recent changes in Saudi Arabia; in fact, she acknowledged that this unquestioned reality might change one day.

With that in mind, Leena shared some of the advantages that she saw coming from mixed writing classes, one of which is “exchanging ideas while writing and expanding on them” besides “learning from each other.” Leena claimed that female students might be the largest beneficiary from mixed classes. One reason was mentioned before, which is experiencing more fair and tolerant treatment. The other is getting used to working in mixed environments, which will benefit them in the future. Leena explained how females lose job offers after they graduate because these jobs occur in mixed environments. Therefore, mixed classes would help these females accept any job offers in the future even if it is mixed because they have a previous experience dealing with men.

Moreover, Leena explained how many families still prefer their daughters to occupy teaching positions because it is one of the few places where women exclusively work with women only. For this reason, being in a mixed class might force families to change their idea about their daughters being in a mixed job. Also, Leena talked about how male students might have split opinions about being in class with female students; some might accept it while others might reject it. The accepting group might just simply be “open-minded”, but the rejecting group might think that they would not allow their sisters to be in such a class. She continued, saying, “problems might increase and maybe one would find his sister speaking to a male colleague and he would kill her, so how can you make this brother understand that this colleague is just a classmate.” Leena saw more problems coming from mixed classes, saying “it might lead to

problems and harassment, especially that since we came to the world, we followed this idea (separation) so it is almost innate to us.”

When turning to the male students, one also seemed unable to make up his mind on mixed classes. Khaled referred that he has been in separated classes all his life until he graduated high school. That is when he traveled to the UK and was enrolled in mixed ESL classes. Khaled recalled his UK experience, stating, “I was 19 or 20 and [at the time] had never spoken to the opposite sex, so when I went there, it was intimidating and shocking to realize the barrier between us and the opposite sex.” Since he had a lifelong experience in separated classes, when I asked him, what advantages do separated classes carry, he was a bit discreet saying, “it depends on the person” then asked to pass the question and not answer it. I sensed his discomfort, so I skipped it. Khaled didn’t have an answer for the disadvantages of separated classes either, replying, “Nothing, I don’t see any disadvantages.” However, when I asked Khaled what he thought would happen if classes became mixed, he expressed assurance that “nobody will accept the situation at the beginning” and that the rejection would come mostly from the student’ families, along with some of the students themselves but “not all students” as he said. Khaled started to be a little open in his responses remarking that some male students have a barrier between them and females in general, and that this barrier impacts or eliminates the communication with the opposite sex.

From there, Khaled started talking about the possibility of mixed classes being a reality soon saying, “nothing nowadays is impossible.” He pointed out that mixed classes have already started in some departments such as, medicine, so it's not impossible that it happens soon at all departments. Khaled indicated that if such a change happened in the English department, classes would be “different.” Then, when discussing the advantages or disadvantages of English classes.

According to him, the advantages could be, “participation, listening, giving, receiving, and exchanging information”; however, the disadvantages might be “a lot” and “impacting both genders,” and the most significant disadvantage is “infringing upon others.” Then, he emphasized that “many guys are not ready for this change.” When I asked Khaled about the challenges that administrators need to be aware of before making a change to the formatting of higher education classes, he mentioned “the annoyance of families.” Khaled believed that it would be a challenge to make families accept the new situation, saying, “adjusting to the situation will be hard.” Khaled summed up his responses to the mixed classes situation by anticipating some students dropping out from college as a result of the hypothetical change.

### **The Essence of the Phenomena of Communication with the Opposite Sex**

The lack of communication with students from the branch of the opposite sex in reality, does not indicate that these students were not already in communication virtually. There was a benefit in the informal distance communication methods that the majority of the participants have experienced. This resulted in most of participants to prefer these distance methods over in-person for future communication. However, that does not mean that all participants were against physical communication and mixed classes. As it was evident in the participants’ perceptions of mixed classes in this chapter, female participants showed distinctively high acceptance and excitement for mixed education more than male participants. Both female and male participants brought in their perceptions of their experiences in the current sex-separated English classrooms and compared them to the experiences of a hypothetical mixed-sex English classrooms. The similar and different perceptions of participants added to the structure of the phenomenon.

A highlight of the phenomena of communication with the branch of the opposite sex was that all female participants wish they are taught by male instructors regularly, they refer to male

instructors as not being as strict as female instructors. In contrast, male participants were not sure how they feel about female instructors teaching them since they never had a female instructor before. With that said, the perceptions of female participants of how male instructors act compared to female instructors was valuable and unique. It is considered as one of the most significant findings of this study and one that should be investigated more.

On a different note, the topic of mixed-sex classes is very sensitive to talk about by both female and male students. Even with the recent changes in the country, many still find it hard to accept the idea of sharing the same college buildings and classrooms with the opposite sex. I applaud the participants for being open minded to discussing this sensitive idea and imagining a hypothetical situation that some of them have never experienced before. Their thorough responses to the questions I asked regarding mixed-sex classrooms show that this new young generation is ready to embrace a new construct of the Saudi society. A construct where men and women participate equally in the development of the country without thinking of one or the other as less but rather as complementary.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE POSSIBILITIES OF TRANSLANGUAGING IN THE SAUDI EFL CLASSROOM**

#### **Chapter Introduction**

This chapter aims to highlight participants' perceptions about the historical and cultural origins of the academic English language and research writing, and whether or not participants see these origins influencing their knowledge or practice of English writing. One of the recent breaks away from these origins could be related to a new concept in the teaching of academic English writing called "Translanguaging." As a reminder, translanguaging in the context of learning English means the simultaneous use of a learner's native language while learning English, meaning that the two languages are used together in a dynamic process where the two languages are viewed as one linguistic repertoire, not as two distinct language systems. Translanguaging differs from code switching as the former considers the mesh of languages in discourse, while the latter promotes switching back and forth between languages.<sup>30</sup>

Female and male participants are asked about this new concept and investigated about the current and future use of translanguaging in the Academic Research and Writing course and other English courses. The use of translanguaging in an English course, especially in a course that teaches the standard academic English language and research writing, is considered a shift from the traditional use of academic English. A phenomenological change in the way academic language is used and written. Translanguaging interested most of the participants and some of them questioned why it was not already in use in their classes.

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<sup>30</sup> Translanguaging and code meshing are very similar as both promote the use of two languages at the same time in discourse. A minor difference between the two is code meshing occur in situations where users are competent in both languages, while translanguaging occur in situations where users are not necessarily competent. Also, one focuses on the bilingual or multilingual communities while the other focuses on individuals rather than larger communities.

Starting with the female students' standpoint, almost all female participants anticipated the rejection of translanguaging use in their female-taught classes for several reasons. Some reasons are; Experiencing a female instructor's discouragement from speaking Arabic in class in the past, considering translanguaging as a silly way to learn English and so it will not be supported by instructors, and believing that not using Arabic in class is for granted and natural when learning English. Therefore, female participants were not sure how translanguaging would take place in their English courses even though they were excited about its use. Thinking about these perceptions from the female students about how translanguaging would be rejected in their separate classes, it would be very shocking to learn that some forms of translanguaging are already in use in the male section. Most male participants in this study were clear in indicating that some practices of translanguaging are used in their sperate classes. Some male participants indicated that they could respond to a question in Arabic if they don't know the answer of it in English. Although using Arabic was not a preference in the male section, it seems that male students were not strictly discouraged from speaking Arabic in class as female students were. However, the majority of male participants reported that they can't use Arabic in writing assignments, which was reported by the majority of female participants as well. With that being said, the participants' sex apparently plays a role here. Tying this to the female students' revelation about how male instructors were more flexible and tolerant in class it supports the male participants revelation that they allow some use of Arabic in class.

Like the previous two chapters, in this chapter, the feminist standpoint is enacted by focusing on the female students' perceptions in the analysis, while male perspectives are used to support or contradict these responses. There are three main themes covered; the lack of interest in the historical and cultural origins of the academic English language, the use of

translanguaging is gendered, and the implications of translanguaging use. Each theme section contains subsections to facilitate the reading. Finally, the chapter concludes with the essence of the phenomena of using translanguaging in the EFL context.

### **The Lack of Interest in the Historical and Cultural Origins of the Academic English Language**

When I moved to the section of the interviews that investigated the historical and cultural origins of the academic English language, participants were asked first if they were ever taught the history of the English language. A few participants indicated that they learned little information about the English language history in their literature courses, but all participants agreed that they were never taught anything about the history of academic English language specifically academic writing. Therefore, participants were given a brief explanation about the history of academic English writing being established by white male scholars. This brief explanation was necessary to measure their awareness of the information that I shared, and their awareness of how much influence it has on their learning and practicing of academic English writing.

The writing history that I explained to the participants relates to the writing guidelines that encompass the standard rules of writing in academia. In order for someone's writing to be considered valuable and credible, they need to follow certain rules when accomplishing it. Following the writing guidelines means following rhetorical patterns of academic English. Ina Suryani et al., (2013) reported that "the available research writing guidelines constructed in the native speaker context often fall short in addressing rhetorical aspects related to cultural issues that have been known to influence most non-native English (NNE) writings." (p.29) Writing research or writing in academic English requires a level of proficiency that all of the participants

in my study lack. Not to mention that writing in academia was and has always been done through an Anglo-European or an Anglo-American perspective, a perspective that does not take into account the intercultural convictions of writing that non-native speakers of English are familiar with. (As established by Ina Suryani et al., (2013), Noraini Ibrahim & Radha Nambiar (2012) in critique of John Swales' (1990) CARS model in *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*)

Following the brief explanation of the history, I asked participants a question to measure how much their knowledge of the history that I explained influences their enthusiasm to learn English. But, when I was hit by puzzled pauses from participants, I knew that my brief explanation probably did not connect to them and that they were probably confused about what I was asking. So, I clarified the question by explaining how English is a language created by people who do not look like us (Saudis /Arabs) and who do not share our culture, our religion, and our beliefs. Then, I asked the same question about enthusiasm again, and all participants, regardless of sex, agreed that knowing this history doesn't influence their enthusiasm to learn English or English writing. It seemed that to the participants, this history is obvious because English is created by western English men who are nothing like Arabs, so nothing new was there.

Then, I asked the participants whether they think that this factual history influences their attitudes toward learning the English language in general or learning English writing in specific. Most participants, regardless of sex, did not see any influence of the history over their English learning attitudes. Also, most participants agreed that knowing this history does not change their practice of the spoken or written English language. They are going to practice the language as it is being taught to them without change, even if this practice of the language does not align with



their collective identity or unique identity that makes them part of the Arab culture.

This identity is related to what Stuart Hall (1997) described as “the colonized Other.” The Other is the identity of everyone who is not English; “They were placed in their otherness, in their marginality, by the nature of the “English eye,” the all-encompassing “English eye.” (p.20) Hall (1997) continues to explain how the English identity is structured in relation to “the Other” saying “to be English is to know yourself in relation to the French, and the hot-blood Mediterraneans, and the passionate, traumatized Russian soul. You go round the entire globe: when you know what everybody else is, then you are what they are not.” (p.21) This identity description goes hand in hand with what Said (1979) explained as “the occident” (the west) and “the orient” (the east.) These terms depict the identity of the west as “rational, virtuous, mature, “normal,” and the east as “irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, “different”.” (p.48) These unfair and biased identity descriptions were rejected by both Hall (1997) and Said (1979.) Linking this to the current study, in the case of learning and practicing EFL, the participants perceive that when it came to English, native speakers know better than non-native speakers, so whatever they set as rules should be taken for granted and should not be questioned or modified. The participants’ perceptions of language seemed fixed and static, rather than fluid and dynamic.

Moreover, most participants saw no connection between the history and the cultural origins of the academic English language and their learning of academic English writing. They saw it as an unimportant and unnecessary piece of information to begin with. They viewed themselves as having very limited to no authority over the English language as non-natives who cannot influence how a language is spoken or written. They merely take the language as native speakers communicate it without changing it. Some female participants even referenced their status as “students” who are obligated to follow certain rules or techniques set by their

instructors without negotiating or changing anything, or they will lose points, or worse, fail classes. So, it appears that participants initially viewed themselves as being in a weak position where they cannot influence English as learners of it.

However, when I switched to a more empowering position and asked the students what their attitudes would be when they enter the work force and become “the voice” for English communication, their answers varied. The majority answered in a variation of “we would not change anything because we want to be taken seriously”; a few were more optimistic accepting the idea of reflecting their identity in academic English teaching or writing when their positions change. Nevertheless, what is obvious from the participants’ perceptions is that they did not understand how knowing about the history of academic English writing could influence their writing of English. They were not interested in the history and did not see it as impacting the learning nor practice of language.

### **Attitudes towards the writing guidelines**

When asked if she would like to write in English without specific rules, Eman expressed her happiness excitedly saying, “of course! it makes me happy to write with no specific rules, happy to not have a style or forbidden topics to discuss with total freedom.” Eman in this response combined freedom to write in any topic she chooses, with having freedom to write in rhetorical patterns that she sees as representing her identity and culture. Which contradicts the view that she and other participants carried about English being static and rule oriented.

Speaking more specifically about her approach as an instructor teaching the language in the future, when Eman was asked about the teaching of freer academic English writing style in her class when she becomes an instructor, she seemed to back up from her previous excitement. Eman said; “as an instructor, I would do the same as my teachers, teach [students] what I was

taught. I'm obligated to teach the same thing, for the degree." She emphasized that teaching the writing guidelines in a way that is unfamiliar to the rest of the world would be "unfair to student's future." Eman felt that it would cause students more harm than good, and would get them nowhere, especially because they will be expected to know standard English writing. Eman indicated that teaching and writing free writing style is "not endorsed anywhere"; therefore, it's a must to teach students the common standards of academic English writing. She said, "I will teach and ask [students] to write in the original style, who wants to follow the free style, I will grade them based on it, and who wants to follow the rules, they can follow it." The standpoint that Eman takes here reflects how the beliefs about language as being static with no fluidity that she carries overrun any reform to the concept of language writing.

In the same manner of being hesitant, Eman indicated that the history of academic English writing does not influence her learning of writing by any means and that she is "obligated to learn the system to graduate and earn a degree". She emphasized that since students like her learn English "the rules are enforced upon [them]." With that in mind, she doesn't seem to understand the reason for having writing "rules" in English, as she spoke about Arabic saying that it does not require following a system "even in official letters" elaborating "just start with greetings then say what you want to say". However, is Eman's claim accurate about the Arabic language? Many scholars who studied Arabic learners of English referred to the multiple difficulties these learners face when writing in English because of the many discrepancies between the writing guidelines of the two languages. This indicates that Eman's suggestion about Arabic structure is not accurate, she might have made this assumption about Arabic from a native speaker's standpoint, a standpoint that might not realize Arabic has its unique writing guidelines.

One study by Ruwaida Abu Rass (2015) looked at the challenges in writing English that

Arab students face because of the difference between “English and Arabic linguistic and orthographic systems.” (p.49) Two of the major differences between Arabic and English that these Arab learners face in writing is associated with “transfer[ing] the stylistic features of Arabic as their first language” and “degree of explicitness and implicitness of the message” that they write. (Alsamadani, 2010, Mohamed & Omar, 2000 as cited in Abu Rass, 2015, p.49) Some examples mentioned in the study are:

[Arab writers] tend to write long sentences with coordinating conjunctions ... repeat themselves and argue through presentation and elaboration ... often talk around the topic and repeat phrases before stating the main points ... usually avoid conveying their messages explicitly, assuming that readers are responsible for understanding the message. They also tend to transfer their first modes and patterns of thinking in their first language. (pp. 49-50)

Moreover, Abu Rass (2015) referred that besides these difficulties in English writing, Arab writers have been the victim of “the product rather than the process” writing instruction that “emphasize grammar and punctuation rather than content and organization of ideas.” (p.50)

The next female participant, Reem was not quite sure if she learned the history of English or English writing, but recalled a piece of information about English literature saying, “women were not able to write in the past.<sup>31</sup>” Reem honestly admitted to not following the writing guidelines she is taught when writing papers or assignments because she “changes some parts and skips other parts” and that she tries to follow it only if she is asked by her instructor. This shows a rebel from Reem’s side because not only she doesn't follow the rules of writing, but also, she modifies them. Therefore, she believed that her awareness of English writing history

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<sup>31</sup> Reem is referring to The Brontë Sisters here.

does not have any influence on her enthusiasm to learn the language nor the writing. Initially, Reem indicated that language learners, including herself, shouldn't take the English writing guidelines as it is and that they need to make their own changes to it, especially if it is going to be read by those who are already in academia. What Reem brought to the table here is a bit confusing because she is suggesting that those who identify as language learners should not follow the writing guidelines at all and should write in any form they want. The assumption here is that the field's target audience's job is to understand the writing no matter what since they are insiders.

Reem's indication of the audience was surprising, no other female participant mentioned the targeted audience of the writing, not in this chapter nor the chapter where the writing course structure and assignments were discussed (chapter 4). Apparently, no discussion of audience occurred in the female sections of the course, it seemed that it was not a point discussed during the teaching of academic writing to the female students. This is an indication to how this course needs possibly more modifications in the way it is taught at the female section specifically. The discussion of audience is one of the most important discussions in any writing course, even in courses that teach English writing to non-native speakers of English. The discussion of audience in the male section seems to occur as indicated by male participants later on in this section.

As indicated in chapter 4, what seems to be the focus of instructors in students' writings is the focus on grammar and spelling. This focus is related to an old popular form of rhetoric that many teachers around the world adopted for more than a century called "current- traditional rhetoric." James Berlin (1980) adopted the current-traditional rhetoric definition of Richard Young (1978) writing, "the emphasis on the composed product rather than the composing process ... the strong concern with usage (syntax, spelling, punctuation) and with style

(economy, clarity, emphasis).” (p.1) Berlin (1980) stated that the current- traditional “diminish the importance of the audience” and it perceives the audience as “a pupil, an essentially passive receptor of information.” Berlin (1980) added “the kind of audience analysis found in Aristotle, Campbell, and Whately simply has no place in the current-traditional,” and that “to consider the audience is to shift from the focus on the subject truth to the emotional subjectivism of persuasion.” (p.4)

The current-traditional rhetoric is the same instruction that my participants seem to have received, so imagine my surprise when Reem mentioned the audience. To explain herself a little, Reem gives an example of how she would change the approach to writing a literature review is by changing its rhetorical purpose. Reem clarifies this saying, “maybe I do not want to fill a gap, maybe I want to write about something totally new.” This response by Reem is an indication that she, and probably other students as well, want to write “a pure opinion paper,” aka a paper without any support. This move could be taken as a step to not following the rules for writing English research papers and reflecting one’s own identity in research writing.

Although Reem indicated that the audience she is writing to would understand her writing even if she did not follow standard rules for research writing, what she is suggesting here contradicts what research has said about the audience so far. There is no doubt that it is important to think about the targeted audience, and that this audience might already know what the writer is writing. However, changing the standardized rules of the writing could result in the audience rejecting the writing, especially if this audience does not share the writer’s cultural background. Ina Suryani et al., (2013), referred to this as “knowing the readership,” which is an important step that writers identified as non-native speakers of English need to take to know who exactly they are writing to. This would help them “decide how much effort should be put in complying

to the model of Anglo- American perspective.” In other words, Suryani et al., (2013) wrote “if the research article is intended for a European journal or an American journal, putting reasonable effort to adhere to the conventional Anglo-European model is more realistic in comparison to using the models developed based on cultural variance.” (p.35)

When Reem was asked about whether or not history could influence her teaching of English writing in the future, she said “no, it’s just a piece of information.” She elaborated that she was never interested in knowing the history of anything because if she was, she would have “looked for it.” Reem’s belief reflected on her strategy to teach students in the future as she indicated teaching them in the same way she was taught. In addition, Reem believed that knowing the history does not benefit students and will not change anything for them. Like Eman, she emphasized that students do not have much choice when it comes to the way they write research “[they] are required to write research in a certain way.” This is an indication that students are compelled by instructions to follow certain guidelines and rules, and if they do not follow them, they will lose grades. Reem frankly stated “[students] can’t argue with [a teacher] whether writing guidelines are proper or not,” because instructors would not allow it and they would view arguments like these as “a waste of time.”

Moving on to another female participant, Badriah. When she spoke about her reaction towards knowing how academic English writing was established, she showed some confusion saying, “using [the writing guidelines] depends on what I want to use it for,” and that “the writing guidelines goes along with [her] understanding of life.” Badriah indicated that knowing the history does not influence her excitement to learn English. Badriah confirmed that she follows the English writing guidelines without questioning it “80% of the time.” Although Badriah does not comment on what the remaining 20% is, it is very possible that she might be

confused about certain rules in the English writing guidelines, since it is not like the Arabic writing guidelines after all. I believe that the 20% is related to how she sees some English writing strategies as hard and different for her since English and Arabic are two vastly different languages. Badriah indicated that she abides by the English writing guidelines, yet she goes back again to say that the history of English writing “does not influence” her learning of English writing. This is an obvious confusion from Badriah’s side because if the history of writing does not influence her learning of English writing, then why is she following it when she writes? If the history of writing is not influential in the first place, then why doesn’t she write in a free-form way of writing? This confusion is not just with Badriah, but it recurs with most participants.

The confusion with Badriah continues as she claimed that she might use her own style and structure when writing English documents in a future job since Arabic would be affecting her writing in English. Yet, she contradicted herself again by saying that if she was given certain writing rules and was asked to write a paper in her future job, she will follow those rules without question. This means that she will not reflect her own perspective in the writing she does. At the end, Badriah thought that Saudi students should be taught the history of English writing in a course focused on English writing because their attitudes towards learning the language might “slightly change” knowing the history.” Although Badriah does not mention how knowing the history would change students attitudes, I took her response as an indication that knowing the history might give students a window to see English writing as a chance to be expressive and reflect their Muslim-Arab-Saudi identity.

Just like the other female participants in this study, Leena viewed the history of academic English writing as unimportant and unnecessary to know, stating “I don't care who established the writing guidelines.” Leena’s uninterest in knowing how the writing guidelines was



established stems from her desire to focus on what's important to her, which is learning and improving her language skills, saying "what I care about is my performance and my proficiency in the language. I should know the language itself more than anything else, so I focus on the language and the culture behind it more than anything else." Leena clearly stands by the claim that none of the history information will benefit her as an EFL speaker, so she should focus on learning the language itself and not on learning useless information. Leena gave an example of how she was taught many things about and in English literature, but at the end, she did not care about it because it did not benefit her. What she really cares about is communication in the English language itself, not the history nor the literature. Leena added "we live in a time where English is more important than any other language" emphasizing that knowing English has a worldwide value.

The worldwide value that Leena is indicating has been the subject of many EFL research, including those focusing on the Saudi context. However, the teaching of English in Saudi Arabia was not always encouraged or supported, particularly when the subject started to be part of education in Saudi Arabia. Tariq Elyas and Michelle Picard (2010) indicated that "throughout the early history of education in Saudi Arabia, there was a general reluctance to teach English or any other foreign languages." (p.139) This reluctance is due to the fear that was spread by "a number of clerics" that learning foreign languages would influence the Islamic identity of the country and its citizens. However, this fear proved to be unreasonable because the Islamic identity of Saudi Arabia was not affected after the introduction of English and other foreign languages in the country. (p.140) While many educators and religious leaders were against the teaching of English in Saudi Arabia, many were with it suggesting that it is "in line with Islamic teaching due to a Hadith by the prophet saying "He whoever learns other people's language will be

secured from their cunning.<sup>32</sup>” (p.141) No matter what views about the teaching of English that educators carry, the teaching of English is in full glory currently in Saudi Arabia.

The value of learning English now is not just in acquiring it as a communication skill, but in seeing its value to career search and career enhancement especially when considering the Saudi Vision 2030. As indicated in Walaa Bunaiyan’s (2019) study “the 2030 Vision emphasizes the importance of switching to a knowledge- based economy over a resource-based economy,” part of this switch is “to prepare students for these new industries and positions.” (p. 75) This is where the value of English comes. Graduates with high English proficiency have better chance of finding high-paying jobs than those with low English proficiency. Therefore, I get where Leena is coming from when she mentioned the value of knowing the language itself rather than knowing the history of it.

In addition to seeing the history of academic English writing as unimportant to know, Leena described how knowing the history does not influence her writing skill or ability. Leena emphasized that she was taught specific writing instructions by her instructors, and she will not change what she learned before. Leena shared that her previous knowledge of what should and shouldn't be done in English writing prevents her from coming up with her own writing style, so no matter what information she learns now, it will not change her mind. It is like she “knows better” than modifying what practiced in writing for 3 years. Leena insisted “it doesn't matter who established [the writing guidelines], Muslims or not, this is their culture and freedom. Personally, I will follow what I've been following in the major, what I found and learned in my country, as an English major, I will follow the writing guidelines as I learned it.” She added, “English has basics that needs to be followed like Arabic, English is my 2<sup>nd</sup> language, so I

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<sup>32</sup> This was explained in detail in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

shouldn't come up with things.” Having less authority over the language because one is a non-native speaker of English is a belief that many non-native speakers like Leena hold, even though many recent research discussed the influence of non-native speakers over English and over native speakers of English.

David Crystal (2003) wrote about the influence of non-native speakers of a language over that language writing, “Language is an immensely democratising institution. To have learned a language is immediately to have rights in it. You may add to it, modify it, play with it, create in it, ignore bits of it, as you will.” (p.172) Also Crystal (2003) indicated the expansion of English in the current age as a global language “there has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English,” the status that English achieved in the world makes predicting its future hard. (p.189) Due to English becoming a universal language, more and more people from different backgrounds with different languages are learning it every day which makes their influence over English unquestionable. In fact, Crystal (2003) pointed that “the English language is going to be influenced by those who speak it as a second or foreign language as by those who speak it as a mother-tongue.” (p.172)

Contrary to what some might think, the influence of non-native speakers of English over English is not just on a local country level, but it exceeds that to be internationally done on multiple levels. Second and foreign English speakers can use the language in a way deemed as “foreign,” in a way that nobody has expected before. These new usages of English spread out as “people who are important in their own communities – whether politicians or pop stars – start travelling abroad.” (p.173) Crystal (2003) explained this by giving an example on how this change in the language occurs:

an international gathering (political, educational, economic, artistic . . .) during which

senior visitors use, deliberately or unselfconsciously, a word or phrase from their own country which would not be found in the traditional standards of British or American English. Once upon a time, the reaction would have been to condemn the usage as ignorance. Today, it is becoming increasingly difficult to say this, or even to think it, if the visitors have more degrees than the visited, or own a bigger company, or are social equals in every way. In such circumstances, one has to learn to live with the new usage, as a feature of increasing diversity in English. It can take a generation or two, but it does happen. (pp.173-174)

Going back to Leena, when she was asked if learning the history of academic English writing will influence her teaching of English writing in the future, she responded “never,” elaborating that whether she is a student or not, she will not change what she knows about English writing. Leena refers to the fact that as a teacher she will be “obligated” to teach writing as it is widely known, and if she decided not to do it, she might lose her credibility to teach English, saying, “we are following a system put by people bigger than us.” This claim is intriguing because the ideology it carries is related to centuries of imperialism when the English language spread through conquering of many countries around the world, and this exact idea of the privilege of the Englishman spread to citizens of these countries. Canagarajah (2012) explained how this happened saying:

the European nations which take pride in their superiority and in the ways in which their languages serve scientific/technological progress now move beyond their nation-states to impose their languages on other communities. Notions such as one language being more efficient as a shared resource for meaning-making by everyone at the global level, and superior languages helping in human development while backward languages made

redundant, are examples of such technocratic discourses that assist in this imperialistic activity. (p.24)

Although Saudi Arabia was never under official nor structured colonialism, the belief for the superiority of the west is unfortunately carried out from other neighboring countries.

According to Mohammed Almana (1982) Great Britain was the “imperial influence in Arabia” in the early 20th century. Almana (1982) writes “although Britain did not occupy any of the territory in what is now Saudi Arabia, it dominated Muscat, Oman and Aden in the south, and Egypt and Sudan to the west of the Red Sea. It had also promised by treaty to protect a number of sheiks in the territories on the Arabian Gulf, in Particular Sheikh Mubarak of Kuwait.” (p.27)

Going back to Leena, what she means by “people bigger than us” is that English writing was established by native speakers who “know better” than the non-native speakers in terms of what constitutes as English writing. However, her believes that the system is structured in the most logical way possible needs to be noted, because even if the native speakers structured the system in a certain way, that does not mean it should be used that way. We must consider that English is a world language and there is not a specific country that one can identify as the location where “proper English” is used. All the English variations are valid and proper and English is constantly influenced by the non-native speakers’ usage of it as Crystal (2003) indicated above.

Contrary to the responses from all female participants, my last female participant Sarah saw value in knowing the history of English language. Sarah indicated that she was never taught English history or English writing history before because the focus was always on “the fundamentals” which she referred to as “knowing English grammar.” Therefore, there was no point of teaching students English history because “it’s not fundamental knowledge.” However, she feels that knowing English writing history has value in it because it would increase her

enthusiasm to learn about a different culture, different thought process, and different people generally. Sarah claimed that knowing how the English people think and differ from Arabs would push her to “imitate” them and follow their footsteps in language, just like how she follows Arabic. This means that Sarah viewed the knowledge of the history of English writing as important because it would grant her access to English writing rules that are considered standard by native English speakers. In a way, she considered following the English writing rules as a condition to acquire English because she compared it to following the Arabic writing rules that are considered standards among Arabic native speakers.

Sarah brings in an example of those standards by mentioning how English writing is direct and straight forward in the introduction, which contrasts with Arabic that doesn't start directly, but rather moves around the main idea before getting into it. Sarah saw these standards as hard to leave behind or change because it is considered “the basics or the fundamentals for writing” and should be kept as they were created, indicating “nobody would understand what I wrote if I changed the basics.” However, she doesn't see it obstructing her identity from reflecting in the English writing that she would do in the future. In other terms, she will follow “the English” way of writing and will still reflect her identity in what she writes. Eventually, Sarah saw a benefit in knowing the history of English writing by English majors, even if it is not going to be helpful for them in practicing the writing so much, but it is “good knowledge” as she said.

The confusion about the academic English language history continued with male participants as well. Khaled indicated that although he didn't take a course about the history of English language. After explaining a brief overview of the academic English writing history to him, he was asked whether the academic English writing guidelines reflect his life experiences as

a Saudi Muslim, and he replied that the time when the writing guidelines were established had its own circumstances and own situation and that these guidelines were established according to a western life knowledge. Then, when I asked him whether he would reflect his identity in the English writing he does, he replied “if I really like writing, I will be creative, I will add my personal touch and modify [writing]”. When I asked him if he thought people would accept his unique writing style if he was creative in his academic writing, he replied, “[it depends,” adding that the answer to this question mainly depends on three things: “the purpose, topic, and audience.” This is a very important point because it shows that Khaled understood how academic writing works since it basically depends on the points he mentioned.

I suspect that Khaled learned rhetoric in the academic writing course he was in because the other participants did not mention these points and the syllabi does not indicate the teaching or rhetoric. Although Khaled seemed to know a little about academic English writing, he wanted to modify an aspect of his academic writing. This aspect is the use of academic vocabulary. According to Khaled, “sometimes academic vocabulary is difficult to use” and so “using easier vocabulary” would be the solution to this issue. Finally, I asked Khaled whether knowing the history of academic English writing would influence his English writing, he replied “no”, but he thought that it is a useful information to know because it made him realize that academic English writing techniques were created by white men. He believes that students need to know about the history of academic English writing whether it changes things for them or not, because it is essential background knowledge, and they need to be aware of it.

Switching to another male perception, after explaining a brief overview of the history to Abdelaziz, he thought that knowing such information influences his excitement to learn English writing positively. When I asked how, he indicated that such information makes him curious and

excited to know how the west or “those people,” as he puts it, write differently, and to know their method in English writing that is different from the east or “us.” He added, “knowing this would let me see something I never tried, like discovering new things,” indicating a positive influence over the learning process. However, this does not mean that Abdelaziz would compromise his own English writing style, but that he would find a middle solution of mixing what is for granted and what he likes to do in writing. He said, “I would quote from them things and write in my own style.”

Moreover, Abdelaziz referred to his practice of the language in the future indicating that he would practice the same writing methods that he learned, adding, “I will use the style that suits the audience.” Although this response by Abdelaziz and the earlier responses by Reem and Khaled might indicate that these participants were taught the rhetorical situation of an academic writing genre, I don’t believe that they were necessarily taught that, but instead they came to this referral of “the audience” as a natural conclusion to their thinking of the writing they might do in the future during the interviews. In addition, Abdelaziz explained how in the future he might write papers for the west, so he needs to approach them in a writing method that suits their understand. While if he would write something in English to a Saudi audience, then he would use a style Arabs understand to a certain limit.

Thus, Abdelaziz change of style in the future depends on the intended reading audience. At the end, Abdelaziz indicated that knowing the history of academic English writing by English majors is “not important” because no benefit comes from knowing. Abdelaziz interestingly said “at the end, we're all humans and are alike, so no difference between us. If we all grew in similar environments and in modern cities, then we don't have major differences in writing.” But is this true? Are our cultural, linguistic, and social differences eliminated when we read an English



written text just because the label of humanity unites us all? I will discuss this response by Abdelaziz later in the chapter.

In a 2019 interview with the editors of MLA's book *Teaching the History of the English Language*, Colette Moore and Chris C. Palmer indicated that knowing the history of the English language "offers several important lessons for writers and speakers. First, language continually changes to reflect a changing world. Second, every era has had multiple Englishes in use. Third, Standard English did not always exist, and it was constructed over time. Standards are always subject to change as cultural preferences change." The editors emphasis on the influence of "the changing world" and the "cultural preferences change" are all indicators of how English is not, and probably has never been, only in the hands of the native speaker.

Besides Khaled and Abdelaziz, Mohammed replied with a simple "no!" when I asked him whether or not the knowledge of the academic English writing history makes him excited. The reason for his answer is that academic English has no value to him. He explained, "I use everyday English in communication with people, but what do I benefit from formal English? other than just knowing the language." Specifically, Mohammed did not see value in English writing all together, saying, "I don't care for English writing, I'm not going to be a writer". Consequently, Mohammed spoke about how he wants to acquire the language just to communicate with English speakers his future travels, and that this type of communication does not require knowledge in academic English. He gave an example of Arabic and how we use colloquial Arabic not standard Arabic to communicate with non-natives.

Since Mohammed was not convinced in the benefit of English writing, it was a no-brainer that he will not change anything in the academic English writing guidelines, which he described as "complete and enough." Then, Mohammed thoroughly explained that knowing the

academic English writing history could only influence him if he had full English language proficiency; however, he thought of himself as someone lacking English proficiency. How did Mohammed evaluate his proficiency? Through the number of vocabulary he knew. He said that if he knew much vocabulary, then he would write in any approach he wants, but since his vocabulary is limited, he did not have that authority over the language nor over its writing.

Finally, Mohammed talked about how male English major students view English and English writing saying, “all students just want to graduate, they want the degree, nothing else, so they don't care about writing at all, they only want the prestige of knowing English and that they can communicate in English with the society, nothing more.” Mohd. Mahib ur Rahman and Eid Alhaisoni (2013) indicates this “prestige” that Mohammed is referring to in their description of how Saudi students realize now more than ever the value of the English language, which resulted in higher “students’ enrollment” in English language institutes.” This value was emphasized after the attention that the Ministry of Education gave to English writing by outlining the objective for teaching. “Students have realized that English is no longer a language to pass in the examination, but an important subject for higher education, international communication and business and trade. They consider the value of English as highly practical; opportunistic and prestige.” (p.114)

For the last two male participants, Faisal and Khaled, the writing history does not influence their enthusiasm to learn the language. Faisal said, “it is [the westerners’] language and their mother language, so it does not change anything for me.” Ahmed indicated that if something wrongs was with the writing guidelines, “somebody else would have changed it or replaced it or added to it,” but it seems that it is still being taught and used as is. Both participants talked about how they would not change the way they approach English writing, and that they would continue to practice it as they learned it. Ahmed indicated that language and

writing needs to be taken as it is established in the west, and the only time it should be changed is “when it contradicts the religion.” Faisal thought that the only issue that might hinder his practice of writing is not knowing enough academic vocabulary, which is the same concern as Mohammed.

The concern about the quantity of vocabulary was also a concern in Naeem Afzal (2019) study of Saudi English major students at a Saudi university writing “students have limited ‘word repository.’” (p.93) What led these students to admit having incompetent vocabulary repertoire is due to what Alseghair (2015) described as “haphazard and lacks pre-planning” vocabulary instruction in the Saudi EFL classroom. This approach in vocabulary instruction is unsuccessful even though “instructors devote a considerable amount of instructional time to explaining and defining terms.” Alseghair (2015) elaborated that “teachers expect their students to acquire the target vocabulary items on their own without much guidance or explicit strategy instruction, provision of opportunities to learn vocabulary through context, or help with learning specific strategies for acquiring words.” (p.95)

### **The influence of writing over identity**

After briefly explaining the history for Eman, she shared that there are no classes targeting the history of the English language or English writing history that she knows of. Eman referred to her lack of knowledge about English writing as “in desperate need for reading.” With a basic idea of what the English writing history is, Eman commented on how she views this history now as influencing her identity. Eman indicated that although she has never thought about it before, she feels as if she is “forced to follow a western identity” because of these writing guidelines that she has been following. She says that “this feeling is unpleasant,” and that those who follow the writing guidelines while knowing its history are either “want to finish their

study” or “they like the field.” What Eman references here is whoever follows the writing guidelines are either students who don’t want to jeopardize losing their grades over challenging the guidelines, or writers interested in writing and want to gain status in it, and the safest way is not to challenge how it is practiced.

Above all, Eman described her experience of not reflecting her identity in English writing as “unfair” and that following specific writing guidelines is also “unfair. She emphasized that anyone who writes in English and Arabic will “obviously write way better in Arabic because English has rules that are different than Arabic”. She saw this huge difference between the two languages as the reason that anybody who knows both would still be a better writer in Arabic no matter what. Eman highlighted that this difference between languages is making English harder even in free writing, not just academic. She indicated that she used “simple English language” when writing, which is unlike Arabic. Writing in Arabic according to her is “poetic” and the text always comes out “beautiful.”

This concept that Arabic is poetic is a long-held belief that Arabs have about the Arabic language as a result of the history that Arabs have before and after Islam. Sabah Ghazzawi (1992) indicated that “prior to the seventh century, Arabic was predominantly an oral language. Histories, biographies, and poetry were memorized and transmitted orally from one generation to the next.” (p.1) Ghazzwi (1992) specifically wrote about the most common dialect of Arabic among Arabs before Islam writing:

There was another variety of Arabic, prevalent in a large part of the Peninsula, called the Standard Poetic Language (SPL), which had a very specialized use: the recitation of poetry. This may seem unimportant until we remember that, for the Arabs of those days, listening to poetry was one of the main forms of entertainment. There were professional

poetry-reciters who learned many long poems by heart and traveled from place to place. They were always eagerly welcomed, and the people gathered around fires in the evening and listened with rapt attention to hour after hour of poetry-about love, or heroic deeds, or the beauties of nature. The SPL, the variety of Arabic in which these poems were composed and recited, was probably not the same as any of the dialects spoken at the time, but it had some features of several of them. (p.2)

This was prior to Islam, but at the time “The Qur’an” was revealed in Arabic, many scholars explained why this revelation was in Arabic and not in any other language. An explanation for this is that the prophet started his message from the Arabs, and the Arabs are very eloquent people. They were skilled linguistically, and they took pride in how precise and expressive their Arabic language was. The Qur’an came as a challenge to the Arabs’ linguistic proficiency as Ghazzawi (1992) indicated:

the language of the Qur'anic messages was the Standard Poetic Language of the time - a variety of Arabic which was understood and appreciated by large numbers of people whatever their own dialects ... the language of the Qur'an, in the almost fourteen centuries since it was first heard, has always been viewed by Muslim Arabs as the supreme standard of linguistic excellence and beauty. (p.2)

Not all female students agreed with Eman’s perspective about the enforced western identity. Abeer had a different view because she thought that the history of English has no relation to her identity as a Saudi woman. She explained “I feel reflecting my identity in my English writing doesn't matter because I'm not a writer or passionate in writing to reflect my identity or leave my mark in writing.” Abeer in the previous response views herself as merely a learner who is not looking to have an impact over the foreign language she learns. Abeer

believed in following the academic English writing guidelines that was created by the west without any changes. She indicated that she is a student who does not want to be seen as “challenging” her instructors saying, “as a student, I need to insure my spot and my grade.” Meaning that Abeer needs to make sure that her spot as “a good student” is not jeopardized by not following the rules of writing that the instructor emphasizes. She needs to make sure that her grades are not affected, which might happen if she tried to challenge what the instructor teaches as English writing rules.

From Abeer’s experience in learning writing, it seems that following instructors’ rules without questioning them or without reasonable explanation to why certain instructions exist is the norm for an English learning class. It has been established in chapter 4, that the instructor represents the sole and ultimate authority in class. Students, no matter their sex, are in an inferior position than the instructor who is superior to them, especially female students. Intakhab Khan (2010) indicated that many teachers often forget that their role in the class is no longer “a dispenser of information,” but rather as “a facilitator or manager of the students’ learning.” (p.116) Khan (2010) continued, “many teachers are found to have been facing difficulty in performing satisfactorily and fall back with some disappointment on their usual position of authority, expert and main communicator. Most teachers don’t know the concept of TTT (Teacher Talk Time) and STT (Student Talk Time), and even if they know they seldom practice.” (p.116)

With that in mind, Abeer thinks that if she had learned the history of academic English writing before, it could have been a reason for her to be enthusiastic about practicing English writing, which indicates that she is not. Although Abeer did not feel that she will change or modify the English writing guidelines, she saw change as a normal part of life, and that it will

happen to the field of academic English writing with the change of time and people. She gives an example, that she recalls learning in the “Short Story” course, of the Romantic era where writers changed the way stories are written from what was common before them even though they are westerners or English like them.

In her perceptions, Abeer was conscious about the difference between her and the westerners who established the academic English language because she identified them as having “no relation to my life perspective,” and that they are “different than me, and I’m different than them.” This is, once again, confirming the lack of relation between the history of English writing and Abeer’s Saudi identity, which she has established earlier. Abeer views this information about the history as merely an addition to her knowledge base, nothing more. Although Abeer expressed that she is likely not going to change the standard writing style, she referred that as a future employee, she might do it just to “leave her mark,” even if her future employer did not like it, “it’s ok” she says. In that sense, Abeer seemed to be open to change in the future, when she might develop a passion for English writing that would make her want to “leave her mark,” but it is all predictions in the future.

From the male participants, Abdelaziz was in favor of a unique English writing style constructed out of one’s knowledge about the history of academic English writing and one’s own writing style and identity. However, when he was asked “should we follow the English men way of writing? Or create our own way of writing as Muslims and Arabs?” he quickly answered “follow [their] way definitely!” He was clearly hesitant to accept the constructed writing style he was excited for. When asked, “so you would not change their way of writing or add to it?” he answered, “you can change a little, but keep their methods because it’s their language.”

Another male participant, Faisal, mentioned that he does not care to reflect his identity in

writing in the future, and that he would follow the rules set for official writing as he is instructed. However, Faisal clarified that if he wanted to write something outside of his profession or just for fun, he might write it in whichever way he wants, but made sure to emphasize not for official documents or for his career. Adding to the point about writing in professional settings, Faisal said that any changes he makes in the academic writing of documents might be perceived as mistakes by scholars who would contribute it to his identity as a non-native speaker of English. “[Academics or scholars] might think because English is not my mother tongue, I made a mistake. However, that doesn't mean that they wouldn't accept my writing, they might accept it, but highlight those changes as mistakes because English is not my mother tongue.” Additionally, Faisal found no need to inform students about the history of academic English writing saying, “since it is the Englishmen language, I accept what they create and what they consider as adequate writing” and that “it's not students' job to change the English writing guidelines, they need to learn it as it is.”

In the previous response, Faisal mentioned an important point that I think should be emphasized, the writing of non-native speakers of English is scrutinized more than those of native speakers. If the non-native speakers opted for writing that reflects their identity, their writing might be rejected in academia and scholarship. Canagarajah (2012) referred to the genre of research article writing, which is an academic writing genre, as “very tight and rigid” especially to the multilingual writer. Canagarajah (2012) said:

In order to get their research findings published, multilingual authors have been prepared to go to any length to get editing help and services to conform to the dominant conventions and language norms of RAs<sup>33</sup>. Publications such as the *Modern Language*

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<sup>33</sup> Research Articles.



*Journal* officially recommend multilingual authors to send their papers to outsourced copy-editing services before submitting their articles. Even well-meaning scholars who understand the inequalities in publishing and the need for a voice for multilingual authors haven't dared question the power of SWE<sup>34</sup> norms. (p. 122)

As a multilingual writer myself I can say that many academics or instructors might not understand that writing as a native speaker of Arabic involves heavy practice of expressive writing. Meaning that in Arabic writing, we practice excessive amount of free writing about a certain topic that depends exclusively on personal expressions and anecdotes, and not on specific evidence nor research to back up the writing. For example, a writing prompt for “an Expression” course might be “write about a fun trip you took with your family” or “what do you know about butterflies.” I believe this type of course does not exist anymore in its previous in the Saudi general education levels, but I think it is one of the influential causes for struggling to write evidence-based academic English writing for many Arab learners of English in general, and Saudi learners of English in specific. An earlier indication of this was in Reem's response about how she could change the writing approach of a literature review.

### **The Use of Translanguaging is Gendered**

In the middle of his 1999 “TESOL and Culture” article, Dwight Atkinson rejected the traditional views of culture as “monolithic.” He stated that challenging these views is done through “the unveiling of the fissures, inequalities, disagreements, and cross-cutting influences that exist in and around all cultural scenes,” indicating that “cultures are anything but homogeneous, all-encompassing entities, and represent important concepts in a larger project.” (p.627) The influence of the inhomogeneous cultures over the EFL field is enormous, and one of

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<sup>34</sup> Standard Written English.

these influences is the strong presence of the EFL learners' native language while learning English. Translanguaging as a concept has been studied in the EFL field by multiple scholars before as indicated in chapter 2. However, the way I am focusing on translanguaging in my current study is by considering it as a break from the traditional standard way academic English and academic English writing is taught to non-native speakers/ learners of English.

While analyzing the participants' perceptions about this new concept and the implications of its use in the English writing course currently and in the future, an unexpected point was highly emphasized. The use of translanguaging in the separated classes was gendered. Clarifying this, it was evident that male students were already using some methods related to this concept in their section, while the female students taught by female instructors were prevented from using the same methods. This is a major finding of this study because it particularly proves that there is a specific form of knowledge available for the males but not the females. This could be an indication that there might be other forms of knowledge accessible only to the male students, but it was not the focus of investigation in this study. Reaching this finding could not be possible without the female students' standpoint in learning the language and the detailed perceptions they provided about the seriousness of using Arabic in the classroom. Some male participants "casually" indicated the use of Arabic in the class, and some referred to how instructors advised them to use Arabic as an effective tool for pre-writing, but it was never indicated as a serious matter like how the females described.

From the participants' perceptions about using Arabic in their English courses, it was evident that the female section takes speaking English in class way more seriously than the male section. Some male participants indicated that they and their instructors use Arabic in class to clarify points or to communicate generally, but it was not something they thought about twice

when describing it, indicating that possibly it was normal for such actions to happen in the class. With that in mind, what is apparent from all the male responses is that the use of Arabic is not seriously rejected as it appears to be in the female section. However, the situation with writing seems different as participants from both sections reported the prohibition of using Arabic in official writing assignments handed to instructors for evaluation.

### **Using Arabic in the male section vs. the female section**

Interviews referenced how the use of Arabic is tolerated and perhaps endorsed in one branch, but the opposite is happening in the other branch. Eman indicated that she anticipates “male students would use [translanguaging] more than females”, the assumption here is that using Arabic in the females’ class is not tolerated by female instructors, while it is tolerated in the males’ classes. Eman referred that this tolerance happens in the male section in general, not just with the use of Arabic, which shows male students experiencing some exclusion in away, but not female students. When Eman was asked why she thought female students are being treated more strictly than male students, she replied “the [female] instructor wants to make us pay for the effort she made in earning her degree”. Eman gave an example of an instructor who once told them “Don’t think I will give you easy grades”. Eman claimed that some female instructors are not tolerant with female students because they sort of want to revenge for all the hard work they made while earning their own degrees.

Moreover, Eman mentioned that all her female professors and instructors are “old” in age, and she wondered “where are the new graduates?” Eman’s interpretation is that some of her female instructors endured many hardships to get to their positions and academic status, so they want the female students to suffer the same way by giving them a hard time in classes, so female students eventually don’t get the grades that would qualify them to take the old faculty positions.

This claim by Eman is serious and I honestly do not see it as the reason for not being lenient with female students and allowing them to use Arabic in class. The reason I believe has to do with females' sense of responsibility towards applying the rules. Commenting on what Eman said, I have noticed that in Saudi Arabia many females, especially those who occupy positions of authority, tend to go by the book more than males, meaning that they tend to follow the rules more strictly than males who tend to break the rules more. Further evidence from this research in support of this point is coming towards the end of this chapter.

Going back to the use of translanguaging in Eman's course, she thought that writing in Arabic then in English is better than writing in English only, she was direct in stating that her instructors banned her and other students from using Arabic in the class because they wanted students' brains to adjust to thinking in English instead of Arabic, the assumption here is that using Arabic would be harmful not beneficial. What Eman indicated about her female instructors wanting them to think in English only contradicts what Sibert study found (2003), about female teachers not supporting allowing students to communicate in a foreign language unless they utter correct language. Silbert (2003) wrote "this finding may suggest that female teachers value communicative attempts by students more highly than do male teachers." (p.31)

Interestingly, Eman thought that her instructors' approach is the right approach referring to how the use of English only instruction prepared students to being in an English only environment where they endure the stress of the future saying, "well, it's good to be obligated to use English only because in the future you will teach and go other places, so you are getting used to English only future". With these comments Eman seemed to be worried about the future and how the English graduate would not be qualified enough to teach the language or even work with the degree they have in hand, so using translanguaging in her opinion, although helpful, it would

damage the students' career. What Eman seemed to be ignoring here is the fact that translanguaging can be the way to start, not necessary to end, meaning that translanguaging would be beneficial to many second language students who are not confident with their language skills or who struggle getting meaning across, but it does not have to be constant, it is a technique that can easily be dropped or marginalized once the student has enough confidence to do so. Eman's experience with being pushed to speak English when she is unable that was mentioned in chapter 4, is one of many experiences where students are expected to speak English even if they don't have the language skills to do so. Eman's instructor refused to speak to them in Arabic even outside of class and Eman referenced that "even if you sent [the instructor] an Email in Arabic, she would not respond."

As indicated by Eman, that no form of translanguaging is used in the Academic Research and Writing course, which is confirmed by Reem who added that if a student responds to a question in Arabic in class, her answer will not be considered or taken. Reem referred to how the instructor sometimes "forces [students] to speak in English" and "rarely accepts an idea in Arabic" which is difficult to do so "it drives students to becomes quiet." The students' resort to being silent is a reaction to the instructor's strict rule for speaking English only in class, plus the low language proficiency of the female students, which some participants admitted to, does not help the situation. Reem felt that the instructor can translate to them in Arabic either the question or the answer, which would give Reem and other students a chance to learn the language instead of being silent, so the benefit of using translanguaging in situations like this is tremendous. With that in mind, Reem was fully in support of the use of translanguaging in separated classes, and when the conversation switched to mixed, she identified students being a little "embarrassed" as anticipated, but it wouldn't have a great impact on the class except for anyone who "wants to

make a show”. So only if a male or female student wants to show off their language proficiency skills. Which indicates less use of the concept. Reem concluded that the use of translanguaging in classes is generally “a rejected idea” by instructors because instructors would not want to use it because “they want to encourage students to speak English” but in fact “[they] do not know that we are not encouraged that way.”

In the early years of starting in the English department, Abeer wished her instructors spoke to her and other beginning female students in Arabic. Stating that her first semester as an English major was a drop in all her academic life because it was a shock to her. Abeer stated “I thought English would be easy like in high school” but to her surprise it was not as she started with a linguistics’ course, which was very difficult. Abeer pointed out how she got a D in all her courses because she did not have the background or knowledge to be an excellent student, saying “I barely passed.” She continued saying “everyone was speaking in English, and all the terms were new, so I really was frightened. I wish someone talked to us in Arabic, they would've taught us for example what is linguistics. I honestly don't know how I passed Linguistics, I'm sure the instructor pushed me to pass”.

Abeer emphasized how unpleasant her first semester experience was, and not being able to speak Arabic made it worse. She made it clear how her instructors should have spoken to her and other students in Arabic “[instructors] should have talked to us in our native language in the early years, especially that we study English in an Arab country”. Abeer added “if I have traveled somewhere else, I would have thought that it is my fault that I'm struggling because I chose to study English abroad, but since we are in an Arab country and the instructor speaks Arabic too, then why did they not teach us English using Arabic?”. This is an indicator to Abeer’s support for using Arabic in English major courses especially in the early year.

Another indication of Abeer's unpleasant experience starting as an English major comes from how an instructor was asking her and other students to read complex English texts even though they did not know how to read. Abeer indicated that many students did not know how to read the terms in the reading book at a reading class saying, "the reading book had many terms, when [the female instructor] read to us, it had many academic and scientific terms, and the girls did not read because they did not know the academic or scientific terms, they were slowly spelling the terms." Abeer referred then to how upset the instructor was from them and used to argue with them every class meeting on how they should not be English majors and was wondering how they majored in English calling them "lazy." Abeer indicated that because of those words in the reading class, she and other students felt "broken" at the time when they were new to the major "[those harsh words] drove us to hate the major" she said.

Luckily, that unpleasant class experience was not the overall experience for her, she says, even though she was puzzled and lost at times and wished instructors would speak in Arabic, most instructors were supportive and tried to help as much as they can. Abeer said that in the academic research course "no drop of Arabic is used" which is the case with all female participants who took the class with female instructors. And that nobody in class mixes Arabic and English specifically in writing assignments because they will be punished in front of all the class. this is something that Leena who shared the class with Abeer confirmed. However, Abeer indicated that her instructor spoke to them in Arabic outside of class even though she encouraged them to speak in English as much as possible.

Moving to Abeer's classmate, Leena, she indicated that if Arabic was used in class, then it would only be used 20% of the time and would be used exclusively in speaking, "never" writing. Which is something Abeer did mention that sometimes students might mix Arabic and

English when they speak to each other, they might even Arabize English. Leena noted that “Some students” might mix the two languages in writing assignment, but they do not keep it and “erase it”, so they don’t get penalized by the instructor. Also, Leena referred that speaking Arabic to the instructor is allowed in a certain case “if [students] do not understand the English, we can ask her to explain again in Arabic” which is different from what Abeer reported. Leena claimed that they hardly ever ask the instructor to explain what she said in Arabic because her teaching was already clear in English.

The last female participant who was taught by a male instructor, Sarah, indicated that in the academic research course, they were only using English in writing and speaking because the instructor “do not know Arabic,” so students were obligated to communicate in English.

Although Sarah does not necessarily speak Arabic in the class, she mentioned using translanguaging when speaking to her peers in class, but she emphasized that she was always instructed by instructors not to use Arabic in class at all. Therefore, it seems like the default rule for classes is rejecting Arabic communication, yet a few instructors, mostly males, were flexible with this rule.

As indicated earlier, almost all male participants confirmed the use of Arabic in the English language courses. Khaled indicated that in teaching the academic research and writing course, the instructor used both English and Arabic to teach the class, “half and half” as he referred. Adding that some form of translanguaging as I described to him it is used “70%” of the time “by instructors and students alike.” And when asked if all instructors in the department were tolerant towards using both English and Arabic, Khaled replied “it depends on the professor himself, some professors have the capability to convey the meaning in English, some don't have that capability.” Khaled described that instructors or professors don't exactly use translanguaging



as I described it, but multiple instructors tell students to put the meaning of what they want to say in Arabic in their mind, then translate it to English. Then Khaled explained that “[they] do not use Arabic words in their English writing,” but follows their instructors’ advice by thinking of what they want to say in Arabic, then translating it to English. This is interesting because it seems that the male instructors care whether their students understand them or not.

What is interesting though is Khaled response to the following question. When I asked Khaled who he thought uses translanguaging the most female students or male students he replied, “females use this concept more than males because they’re known as being smarter.” Khaled associated using translanguaging in general and translating texts from Arabic to English in specific with females due to his realization that this concept is very useful and as a result females should be excessively practicing it because they know its usefulness. When I asked Khaled where is it known that female students are smarter than male students, he said “it’s noticeable, even our professors say this and insist on it,” which is sort of an indication that professors compare the female students performance with the male students’. Finally, when I asked Khaled whether the format of a class whether mixed or not has an influence on the use of translanguaging he stated that it will be used regardless of class type.

Switching to another male participant, Abdelaziz confirmed that translanguaging is “100% used in the academic research course”, and that the instructor once told them “if you can’t express your thoughts, write the word in Arabic, then explain it in English”. Therefore, the use of translanguaging seems to be encouraged according to Abdelaziz, since students are not on the same language proficiency level, some might face difficulty expressing themselves in English, so they resort to using Arabic and it is “the easiest and most reliable way” to write. When asking Abdelaziz if he saw benefit in using this concept, he responded “of course! it has a benefit of

getting the point across to others”. Abdelaziz explained this here by indicating that if a student doesn’t know the English equivalent of an Arabic word or don’t know if the English equivalent even exist, “they can write the word in Arabic, then explain it in English”. A solution like this doesn’t only “get the point across to others”, but also helps getting the culture across to people more, which should eventually create “better understanding of the culture and society”.

A different opinion about using Arabic in the class was shared by Mohammed, who claimed that the instructor of the class does not explain the lesson in Arabic at all. And no instructor ever did explain the class in Arabic. However, there are instances where instructor clarify points for students using Arabic or talk about an irrelevant subject in Arabic. Mohammed emphasized that since he studies the course in English, everything related to the course needs to be in English including writing. “I need to fulfill all the requirements in English” he said.

Although Mohammed was clear that his instructors don’t use Arabic to explain class content, he was in favor of the idea wondering, “if you are an Arab instructor why not use Arabic to explain the lesson?”. Mohammed repeated what he mentioned in chapter 4 about how instructors should use Arabic to explain class content since everyone in class is Arab emphasizing that they are “still students, not scholars” so instructors need to remind themselves of that when speaking to them in English the whole time. This point mentioned by Mohammed makes sense, since these students admit that their language skills are not in the shape they and their instructors wish to be. Meaning that they are still in the language proficiency levels of beginning to intermediate, rather than the advanced level, so why not speak to them in Arabic, and allow them to use Arabic in writing. After all, the concept of translanguaging was created by language specialists to be used with language learners like Mohammed and his colleagues.

Because Arabic is not used in class, Mohammed indicated that some instructors even

want them to respond to questions in English without the help of Arabic saying, “when we try to speak Arabic with an instructor he says, “English please!” and even when we explain to him that we cannot say the answer in English, he still refuses to speak Arabic to us”. As Mohammed reported, the instructor’s reason for rejecting communication in Arabic in the class is because they are English majors, and after graduation they will teach others English not Arabic. Consequently, writing in Arabic is rejected and no student has ever tried it because it is common sense that it is unacceptable, "I never tried to write in Arabic because I have a feeling it's reject”.

In the same course with a different instructor, Ahmed said that his instructor was not totally against students speaking Arabic, but he did not prefer them to speak it in class. Ahmed emphasized that normally students do not tend to speak Arabic because “it’s common sense to not use Arabic in class and writing,” since it is an English course. From the descriptions for using Arabic in class that Ahmad and other male participants shared, I do not sense that using Arabic in the class was an issue for the male students. Obviously, it was not preferred since the course is still an English course, but students did not seem to be intensely prevented nor discouraged from using Arabic in class by their instructors. This is unlike what most female participants described about the use of Arabic as clearly unacceptable and utterly rejected. This is an indication of how the use of the learners’ mother tongue and the application of translanguaging is gendered, since for the female students it is strict while for the male students it is relaxed.

From the practices of meshing Arabic and English that most male participants in this study seemed to have experienced, it might be possible that a new type of world Englishes is enacted in the male participants’ Academic Writing and Research course. This type is called “Saudi English” as indicated by many scholars. Although this type of English is usually

practiced in informal settings and could take the form of different varieties, I believe that it might have been present in the experiences of not only the male students in this research, but the female students as well. Tariq Elyas et al. (2021) described that “newer empirical research is more lenient towards the concept of Saudi English variety and the WE perspective rather than considering the reported features as errors like any typical SLA and ELT literature would have done (Jenkins, 2012 as cited by Tariq Elyas et al., 2021, p. 24).

### **The Implications of Translanguaging Use**

While almost all participants were excited about using translanguaging in their courses, they were realistic in highlighting the benefits along with the shortages of using it in the EFL classroom, which led to a discussion of its implications in the language teaching classroom. Although the implications of using translanguaging in the English classroom was given less attention by most male participants and was faced by multiple “I don’t know” instances, it was excitingly embraced by female participants. Most male participants indicated that they cannot comment on it simply because they don’t know how it would be like since “presumably” they never experienced it.

The female students’ honesty about their humble language skills that was mentioned in chapter 4, could be an indicator that the use of Arabic is not just recommended, but perhaps necessary in the female section. The goal of translanguaging is to let students who are not confident about their language abilities or skills to know that they are able to communicate meaning in their native language and that it is the first step towards building meaning and competency in the target language. After all, let’s not forget that the human brain does not separate languages, meaning there is not one part of the brain for Arabic and another part for English. All languages are processed the same and bilingual speakers as the participants of this

project have rich linguistic repertoire that far exceed that of monolinguals.

### **Reactions towards translanguaging**

Before the participants were asked about their perceptions of translanguaging, they were given a brief explanation of what the concept entails and how it could be applied in the language classroom referencing that it is fairly new concept in language instruction, especially in foreign contexts like EFL. Since English writing is still hard for Eman no matter what, you can imagine her excitement about the concept of translanguaging. Eman affirmed that “if translanguaging was used in class, students' [written] production would be different” adding “it would make explaining things a lot easier or explaining something not in [western] culture.” Obviously, translanguaging is not used in the academic research course Eman was in, but she confirmed that she uses some form of it all the time “when I study, I use it to organize information to make studying easy”. Eman described how she write an essay in Arabic first, but in English structure and form; then, she re-writes it using her own “simple English words.” So, Eman is using Arabic alphabets in an English writing structure, then she translates the Arabic text to English without changing the formatting or structure.

What Eman indicated using above, is a type of translanguaging since it emphasizes what Angela Creese and Adrian Blackledge (2010) calls as “language fluidity and movement,” where “the boundaries between languages become permeable.” (p. 112) Creese and Blackledge (2010) identify some implications for their use of translanguaging in the bilingual classroom that concludes is “the need for both languages, for the drawing across languages, for the additional value and resource that bilingualism brings to identity performance, lesson accomplishment, and participant confidence.” (p. 112) Canagarajah (2012) explained that the “translingual” concept indicates that “communication transcends individual languages” and “communication transcends

words and involves diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances.” (p. 6) Also, Canagarajah (2012) identified that the subject of his study, that was mentioned in chapter 2 of this dissertation, created “a multimodal text” that consisted of “visual motifs, emoticons, and other symbols in her writing.” Adding that she offers translation of terms throughout her writing and “while some are direct translations, in other cases she offers a paraphrase or an allusion.” (p.135)

Switching to another female participant, Badriah, who was taking the academic research course with a male instructor, reported the instructor’s use of Arabic during class instruction, and during class questions and answers’ part at the end. This answer by Badriah means that the class environment was not an English-only environment. Also, she clarified that even though Arabic was spoken from time to time, English was the main language of writing used by the instructor. Of course, that does not mean the female students were doing the same when taking notes. In fact, Badriah revealed that many female students write notes in Arabic in class, then they later translate what they wrote to English. When doing this, Badriah referred that she felt a sense of “achievement” which she believed would be the feeling that students would feel if they used the concept. As a non-native speaker of English myself, I think this sense of achievement that Badriah referred to comes from feeling confident about the writing because they do not need to check accuracy of the ideas and content.

When Badriah was introduced to translanguaging in the interview, she labeled it as “a beautiful concept” that “spreads the culture of using two languages at the same time and [students] benefit from it by improve their 2nd language just like their native language.” Badriah expressed her wish to had known this concept before because she admitted to having struggle in expressing ideas in English. Yet what Badriah does not seem to realize is that she was already

using a form of translanguaging when she was writing in Arabic than translating to English. Although Badriah admitted to doing this method, her inner feeling about this method when she was performing it was guilt because she felt that if her instructor knew about her (or any other student) doing it, he would be unsupportive, so she felt that it was not something she should be doing. This assumption about the instructor's reaction comes from the inheritance of English-only instruction and direction that this participant and many other students were under for years and years. This type of instruction is used by many instructors and advocated by many others.

From the male section, Khaled thought that the concept of using Arabic to write in English is useful. He admitted that he had written academic texts in Arabic then translated it to English previously. When I asked him of what his instructors thought of his writing when using this method, he said "they were pleased with my writing". Therefore, it is clear that Khaled did not face any problem for using the translation from Arabic to English method, and that his instructors were pleased with his writing "as long as they get his point of view" as he said. When I asked Khaled if he would use literal Arabic words in his writing, he replied "the Arabic language is our pride, but no", the same applies to his Arabic identity due to its unusefulness.

Khaled's classmate Abdelaziz was against the concept all together saying, "I don't use it and I prefer to use full English in writing." I asked Abdelaziz why? His answer was, "I prefer to avoid using it because it makes readers feel that the writing is not understandable, or that it's impossible to understand". To clarify Abdelaziz's answer here, I believe that he was referring to translanguaging as a way that gives the text an image of being inaccessible by readers, which he felt would make readers think they would never understand the idea written. In a different interview, Ahmed was confused about the description of translanguaging because "it contradicts everything [he] learned before" which is English writing being done only in English. From

Ahmed's perspective, the only situation in which the use of translanguaging would be useful is when professionals "write to an Arab audience"; otherwise, using it would have no meaning.

### **Benefits and drawbacks for using translanguaging**

Eman saw saving time as the biggest advantage for using translanguaging in classes and assignments, "I think it's nice to use translanguaging if you don't know how to write a sentence, then use Arabic" which according to her, would influence students positively and saves their time, "I would take 20 minutes instead of an hour writing an essay." All of these points indicate that in writing, translanguaging could be very efficient, but what about in speech? Eman refereed that it saves students the embarrassment of talking in front of the instructor and class. Since instructors retain from using Arabic in class in any form, Eman revealed that she did not struggle much with interacting with the instructor in class. As she indicated, this is unlike what one of her friends who "does not have courage to discuss or ask questions in class" experienced. According to Eman, this friend of hers, does not want to be embarrassed by the instructor for making mistakes in English. "My friend asks us to talk instead of her, she fears she will make mistakes if she talks and everyone laughs" adding "we all try to make her speak, but she says never!" Eman indicated that she was encouraging her friend to speak by following her footsteps "I was telling her to look at me speaking incorrectly, if I didn't make mistakes, I would never learn." This story by Eman stress the importance of incorporating the use of translanguaging in the classroom. I think possibly be talking about herself, not a friend because she mentioned a similar experience that happened to her where she was "pushed to speak English" in the class. Eman might have felt embarrassed to say it was her again, which is understandable given her position.

Being worried about the implementation of translanguaging in English courses, Eman indicated that "students will start to skip English with translanguaging" which is a reasonable



counterargument for not using translanguaging. Obviously, students will not skip English immediately, but they will gradually use Arabic with translanguaging until they would ultimately skip English. Eman said that some will use Arabic for much of their writing, but probably “once or twice” use English. However, the literature about the low English language proficiency of English major students in many Saudi universities, seems to show the use of translanguaging as an important tool that should be soon embedded in many English language classes, including classes for English majors. With that being said, Eman had a practical solution to incorporate the use of translanguaging in writing in the English major class “it needs to be used within limits, or [students] will completely not learn the second language.” Eman envisioned that limiting the use of translanguaging to “four or five sentences in a 3-page essay” would be the best option emphasizing, “I think with limits [translanguaging] would work when you encounter difficulty in explaining things.”

Eman’s suggestion of her personal preference in applying translanguaging goes with what Garcia and Wei (2018) indicated about giving students the freedom to choose the approach they want to take for using it. “Translanguaging has the potential to transform the ways in which language is used in school as students are given practice selecting appropriate features to make meaning for themselves.” (p.4) To get to these “make meaning” features, teachers usually begin with a set of practices that would use translanguaging as “a scaffold.” Examples of these scaffolding practices are “[using] readers in a language [students] understand, creates listening centers where they can hear the school text in a language they understand, or uses more visuals and gestures .. [using] electronic translations and other technology.” All these practices aim to “help students during a transition phase while they are adding and appropriating the necessary features that are required to complete the academic task in one or more named languages.” (p. 4)

Or in other words, these practices help students customize and modify the features they have been exposed to until they come up with their own practices that suits their needs and help them succeed.

Another female participant, Badriah saw the use of translanguaging in class as beneficial 100% of the time because of that achievement feeling she referred to earlier, where students feel that their written ideas are transferred to their readers. She claimed that if given permission, students would use it “without doubt,” and it would be easier to apply since many are already using a form of it which is translating their notes. In addition, Badriah viewed translanguaging as “a great concept to help communicate ideas.” She envisioned that if it was used in class, “80% of students would benefit from it” and would use it correctly, and “30% of students would take it as an excuse to get away with not improving their language or not studying” the assumption here is that they would rely on it too much.

The fear of excessive use of translanguaging in class to the point that it is not in the students' best interest is one of the disadvantages that Badriah saw with this concept. She referred to how instructors might not support it because it would get students to a point where they don't learn or use English anymore, which is a reasonable fear to have; however, as an instructor myself I think it is in the teacher's own hand to make sure that students do not overuse it. This is done through setting up clear and precise goals an instructor want this concept to achieve. Although it has been indicated earlier that what the teacher puts as goal may later change according to what the students modify as features of “meaning making.” (Garcia and Wei, 2018) Canagrajah (2013) adds that “the meaning-making potential of language and human competence emerges through processes of alignment and adaptation, and does not reside in the system of language or cognition.” (p.32)

Abeer shared the same concern with Badriah about the excessive use of translanguaging by students saying, “if given the permission, students would only write in Arabic”. Therefore, she thought that the use of translanguaging would be not encouraged nor supported by instructors due to how unpractical it is for students to use such method in professional settings saying, “professors have conscious, they want the best for the students, they want [students] to become professional academics and this concept will not make this happen”. The reason for this is that “it will make students be unready for professional settings”.

Elaborating on her point, Abeer said, “in companies or schools, we never heard anyone using this concept, so if my instructors teach us and allow us to use it, and then I apply it somewhere outside, everyone will reject my writing because using Arabic will be considered as a big flaw”. Therefore, Abeer thought that using translanguaging methods are not practical because it will let students rely on it and not be able to use it in the real world. What Abeer doesn’t know is that translanguaging is being used in some classes in the male branch even if it is not officially structured or not used in official writing. Abeer was positive about female students not using translanguaging nor Arabic in their writing because of how they challenge and compete each other, and they wouldn’t do something that would reflect on them being less capable.

Although Abeer was excited for using Arabic in English major courses, she outlined rules to using Arabic by English majors. One of the most important rules is to use Arabic for teaching and in classes for the early years of the major, but not the final years “[instructors] should force [students] to speak English in final years”. Abeer’s reasons for this is that speaking Arabic will drive final years’ students to be lazy and not improve their English, so it would decrease their passion and enthusiasm to learn and study English, while it would excite and encourage early years’ students to learn English more. Also, for final years’ students, to limit speaking Arabic to

only after class whenever there is important information that needs to be shared with them, but no Arabic for in-class instruction. Abeer justified this claiming that students in their final years should rely on their language skills in understanding the content presented to them. Another rule is to only use Arabic in speaking, but not in writing. Abeer mentioned how she does not stand “Arabized” scripts” which is using English characters to write Arabic words or vice versa. Indicating that “[her] generation uses it” but it does not make sense to her and that she always “skip such writing” adding “[students] should write in English or in Arabic, but not mix the two languages.”

Thinking about the possible shortcomings of translanguaging and how to overcome it; I did not anticipate what Reem, my second female participant, saw as the only disadvantage of translanguaging. She referred to how the whole concept sounds like “a funny way to speak.” What is funny about it according to Reem is “switching between languages.” I guess this view is there because female students, including Reem, has long been pushed away from communicating in their mother tongue. Any form of official communication not done in English is always and persistently being rejected, and any communication in English is accepted. Reem and other students have been under this influence of language instruction for long that they consider any other way of language instruction as “funny”. Reem echoed students’ view of the use of translanguaging and emphasized how it is impossible to use in class because students would view it as a funny way to speak or write, she exactly said “it's not the time to speak like this.”

Since Reem commented the most on her humble language skills and how it doesn’t compare to that of men, she saw translanguaging as beneficial in “reduce[ing] stress about the language level among female students, since many are under pressure for their language level”. The pressure comes from the people’s view of the female student’s language proficiency level or

how well she knows English. Even though Reem thought of translanguaging as a “funny” concept, she seems to support its use in English writing specifically indicating “less stress and eliminates embarrassment to write” for many students as the main reasons. This would lead to a boost in confidence in the class. The use of translanguaging to Reem seems to be an invitation to struggle less in her courses.

From what Reem and other female participants indicated it seems that these courses apparently use “monolingual instructional approaches.” These approaches are outlined by Cummins (2005) as cited in Creese and Blackledge (2010) as the following:

- 1- Instruction should be carried out exclusively in the target language without recourse to the students' LI [first language].
- 2- Translation between LI and L2 [second language] has no place in the teaching of language or literacy. Encouragement of translation in L2 teaching is viewed as a reversion to the discredited grammar/translation method... or concurrent translation method.
- 3- Within L2 immersion and bilingual/dual language programs, the two languages should be kept rigidly separate. (p.105)

When asking Leena what she took as a benefit from using translanguaging, she saw that “99% of the time there is advantage in using translanguaging in class” emphasizing that “as students sometimes, we know the right answer to a question, but we don't have the right English concept to get the point across in the English way, to have the perfect answer” adding “as a result we get stuck not being able to respond”. The inability to respond with the “perfect answer” in English make students get stuck and not being ablet to respond; therefore, if translanguaging is used, it would provide a much-needed help for students, or as Leena puts it, “[translanguaging]

would work in [students'] benefit.”

Leena even suggested some situations where students can use translanguaging in writing; one is while writing the essay itself, and the other is during the writing process, like starting to write an essay and stopping at an unknown word. Leena said that students can write an entire essay in Arabic, then come back to it, and look up the words it in English, and re-write it in English. Leena emphasized that the use of the concept in any classroom will increase students' participation because “students are not afraid that their answers will be rejected,” since Arabic is permitted, and they have the option to using it.

With that in mind, Leena believed that instructors would not allow translanguaging to take place in any English writing course, including the academic writing and research course. The reason for this as she said, “instructors view[ing] us as language students who are obligated and restricted to write in English with no single use of Arabic”. However, Leena indicted that she prefers to use translanguaging while learning to write in English because it will “save time” adding “sometimes when I write, I stop at a word that I know in Arabic, but not in English, it takes time to look for the word, so using translanguaging would save time.” Also, she claimed that the difficulty of knowing English words, might be stopping many students from learning English, so “using translanguaging would help [them] and give them confidence”. Leena reflected upon herself pointing at how translanguaging would help her “if she forgets something” because it would provide her with the Arabic rescue collar whenever she needs it.

Switching from Leena's experience to Sarah, she liked the translanguaging concept and thought that it would help some people understand what they say when they have a hard time saying it. However, she indicated that this concept would be useful to use with Arab instructors, but difficult to use with non-Arab instructors because “[she] would make more effort to get [her]

point across”. Also, Sarah saw great difficulty using the concept in classes because instructors, regardless of where they are from, “reject the idea to communicate in Arabic all together” in any format whether speaking or writing, adding “I never heard anybody say, it's ok to speak or write in Arabic.” According to Sarah, the consequence for using Arabic would be losing points in the class. However, she viewed it as useful for students when communicating with each other. When Sarah was asked about her opinion on why this concept is rejected in classes, she replied “[instructors] assume that since you are an English major, you are under the spotlight, and it's considered a flaw that you use Arabic in your speaking or writing”

Sarah shared her admiration of the concept and how it makes sense to her, but regardless of how good it sounds, she and other students are required to follow the instructions and not use Arabic whatsoever. She said, “if we don't, we would lose points and get in trouble, and perhaps even fail the course if we don't comply with what instructors ask”. Sarah believed that knowing translanguaging is good knowledge for first year students, but it is not useful to apply in reality. She felt that participants might get used to using Arabic words all the time without learning English properly. “[Translanguaging] might stuck in their heads” she said. Therefore, she anticipated that “it will harm first year students, but not second or third year”. Finally, Sarah thought that being in mixed or sperate class has no influence over the use of translanguaging, saying “besides students using it while chatting to each other, no influence of class structure”.

Moving to the male students' perceptions about the use of translanguaging, Khaled saw benefit in the concept of translanguaging, particularly translating from Arabic to English, because it makes things easy for students saying, “it helps students get the meaning easier and quicker”. However, when I asked him if he saw the use of the concept as a chance for students to boost their self-confidence in what they write, he didn't see it relating to confidence. Khaled is

looking at translanguaging through only the lens of translating texts from Arabic to English, so in that case, he views a student as merely “translating something they already know before” by explaining and breaking down the words. Khaled said that if students were given the chance to use the different forms of translanguaging, that they will use it based on what individual instructors assign in their syllabi, but he personally prefers using it all the time.

Wondering why translanguaging was not used in classes already, Faisal thought that it would be beneficial for students and instructors in the Saudi context in particular where since students and instructors share the same language. Faisal indicated that translanguaging would be useful when expressing one’s ideas clearly, rather than using their second language referencing that “it helps deliver information strongly and quickly”. Moreover, Faisal believed that he would use translanguaging when brainstorming ideas rather than writing official and final documents; therefore, using it would be limited to the early stages of the writing process not later.

Since Ahmed was confused about the meaning of translanguaging, he saw no benefit in it because “learning English needs to be in English.” However, Ahmad indicated the possible usefulness of the concept for beginners of learning English, not those who are almost graduating with English degrees who presumably “should know how to write English correctly.” Ahmad said, “[translanguaging] would facilitate learning” when a learner is “in shock, or don't have vocabulary, or do not know [Arabic] equivalents [of terms].” However, it was evident in chapter 4 that the language level for most participants is still in the beginning stages, and their writing skill is far from being advanced.

### **Does someone’s sex influence their use of translanguaging?**

Eman saw no relation between the use of translanguaging and mixed or separated classes, she believed that the concept is beneficial to students no matter what the class format. In fact, she



thought that using the concept might benefit a mixed class more because it would help with increasing participation among female and male students that predictably would not be high due to social barrier between the two. Therefore, using the concept would help breaking the social barrier. However, Eman indicted that the use of translanguaging in mixed classes would fail if the respect between female and male students got weak. Eman referred to respect in chapter 6 as something that would make or break a mixed class for her. In contrary to Eman, Badriah thought that there might be a difference in use claiming that female students can be more expressive than male students, so female students would find an opportunity in translanguaging “to express their opinions more”.

Badriah’s comments here immediately made me think of Flynn (1988) who indicated that “Women's perspectives have been suppressed, silenced, marginalized, written out of what counts as authoritative knowledge.” (p.425) In applying translanguaging, the use of the female learner’s native language would help them make their voices heard. Flynn (1988) also used Belenky et al. (1986) *Women’s Ways of Knowing* to work through the approach of how women develop intellectually which is tied to “self and voice.” (p.427) Badriah predicted that because of the expressive nature of female students, “[they would use translanguaging] better than male students”. However, Badriah thought that if both students were in a mixed class, then the use of translanguaging might turn into “comical instead of educational” opportunity because “students might make fun of each other” for using translanguaging.

From the male section, when I asked Abdelaziz about his opinion on the influence of class format (mixed or separated) on the use of translanguaging and whether that would make it any different, he replied with “no, no difference.” A comment that Abdelaziz interestingly said earlier when discussing the history of academic English is that “at the end, we're all humans and

are alike, so no difference between us. If we all grew in similar environments and in modern cities, then we don't have major differences in writing.” This was interesting to stop at and analyze because what Abdelaziz is suggesting is that humans’ cultural, linguistic, and social differences are eliminated when they write in another language. Abdelaziz here seems to add someone’s sex to the list of differences that don’t separate humans when writing in English. The assumption is that we are all humans at the end of the day, and there is more that unites us than divides us. When a non-native speaker of a language write in that language, their message will get across no matter what structure, alphabet, or terms they use, the message will still be delivered. The argument here seems that multilingual texts are more likely to unite humans more than monolingual ones.

To explain this argument, it is important to be familiar with an 18<sup>th</sup> century notion called “the Herderian triad” that Canagarajah (2012) discussed. The Herderian triad was established by the philosopher Johannes Gottfried Herder. To analyze the native speaker’s identity in light of the Herderian triad, Canagarajah (2012) indicated that when a person is defined as “a native of a single language,” that language also defines the person’s “identity” by attaching that person to “a community and a place.” This would give “the so-called native speaker, ... the authority to define how the language is to be used.” This authority obviously makes native speakers “the owners” of the single language, but it also makes them “interlopers in other languages.” Canagarajah (2012) explained how the identity of the native speaker depends on “the language, community, and place that locates our birth” all are things that nobody can choose. Canagarajah (2012) further clarified that as humans “we have the ability to speak our “native” language intuitively and enjoy authority in it. On the other hand, we are supposed to be incompetent or inauthentic in the languages of other communities.” (p.22)

Canagarajah (2012) seems to be referring to the idea of how multilingual texts unite the world in his discussion of discourse after “the Herdrian triad” age, which is the time period we live in today saying:

Post-Herderian discourses ... theorize people’s ability to align with multiple communities, treating them as mobile, constructed, hybrid, and heterogeneously constituted. Such are the diverse lifestyle, diaspora, and virtual communities formed in the age of migration, social media, and transnational connectedness today. These communities are not based on the rigid identification criteria of traditional markers such as language, ethnicity, or place. People come together, united by tentative interests or goals, from diverse backgrounds and places ... Scholars are now borrowing metaphors from chaos theory (see Appadurai, 1996) and aesthetics (Papastergiadis, 2000) to define communities in a more open manner, where there could be stability despite fluidity, harmony despite difference, and structure despite flux. (p. 198)

it seems that the fluidity in the transglobal and transnational world we live in today makes it hard to determine a specific way language is be communicated. The influence of someone’s sex the use of translanguaging seems blurred as well.

### **The Essence of the Phenomena of Using Translanguaging in the EFL Context**

The almost unanimous agreement on not changing the way participants’ write in English is interesting. I had anticipated that male students would not be in favor of breaking away from the standard English writing, but what surprised me is how most of the female participants were also not in favor of changing the way they write in English. According to Sibert (2003) “men are more likely than women to endorse beliefs indicative of a restrictive view of language learning.” (p.30) Meaning that male students are more likely to support traditional and standard methods

for learning English than female students. However, in this study, when it came to being divided from the historical and cultural origins of academic English, it seems that both sexes were hesitant to embrace this division and to admit its influence on their learner identity, so both were in support of the standard written English.

Considering the participants' perceptions about the history of academic English writing, it is hard to forget that these participants were interviewed when they were students or new graduates. As mentioned before, their weak position as students was greatly influencing their responses, but when hypothetically that position changed, a few changed their responses. Those who answered with no for changing the way they approach academic English writing later in life, responded with mainly two reasons; First, academic English writing has a worldwide system that is mostly unified everywhere, so changing it or making it reflect a personal identity is not practical nor professional. It might lead them to being penalized by their superiors in the workspace or in academia. Second, many participants indicated that since they are non-native speakers of English, they are not in a position to modify the English language, especially in academic writing. In that sense, they viewed themselves as in a position of weakness, not strength. Canagarajah's (2012) description of how the Herderian triad notion viewed the native speaker, corresponds with how most of the participants in this study viewed native speakers of English. This view concluded to the authority of native speakers over the English language in general and academic English writing in specific. This has made them superior to the non-native speaker who filled the inferior position.

With considering the dissuasion about translanguaging in this chapter, it is time that Taif University and other Saudi universities start to implement using Arabic in English teaching courses. There is a high need for applying translanguaging in these courses as many learners of

English, including English majors, have low to medium proficiency in English communication. Much research is done about and in the English classroom in the Saudi universities, and a number of it complain about the weak performance of English major students. Many English educators in the Saudi higher educational system need to follow the lead of many nations around the world, and start to think of languages as complementing each other not contradicting each other.

As the findings of this research indicates, it seems that both female and male students are in support of translanguaging inside their classrooms. Translanguaging offers the chance for students to feel confident in a situation where they need it the most, especially female students who seem to be less confident in their English language skills and seem to blame their selves constantly. Also, female students are apparently strictly prevented from speaking Arabic in classes, so they might need applying translanguaging more than their male counterparts. There seems to be a constant repeated call in the filed for ways or methods that can be incorporated to enhance the students' performance. I believe that translanguaging is one of the best methods to incorporate to help in that area, so it needs to be introduced to the Saudi English classroom sooner than later.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **WHAT IS NEXT?**

This final chapter of the dissertation starts with an overview of the current study that focused on the experiences of Saudi students writing academic English in sex-separated classrooms. Then, it moves to recount of major findings of the research. After that, it offers a recall of the study's research questions with responses to these research questions based on the major finding of the study. Next, the chapter moves to a discussion of the implications of the research for Saudi higher education. Finally, the chapter ends with a final thought as the concluding statement.

#### **An Overview of the Study**

This phenomenological study investigated the experiences of Saudi female and male English-major students in a sex-separated course that teaches academic English writing and research in Taif University, Saudi Arabia. The focus of this research was Saudi students and how they perceive being in a sex-separated classroom that teaches them research-based writing, for a language they probably mostly use inside the university campus in classes, but not necessarily outside in their everyday life. All those students have been in separated classrooms from formal general education all through higher education. All male participants have had only male instructors throughout their education, except for two who had experienced mixed classrooms with female instructors abroad in English intensive courses that falls outside of the general and higher education line. For the females some have had male instructors before, and some did not, and only one female participant had experienced mixed classes for a brief time abroad (two months) in an English intensive course. The participants' perceptions in this study were analyzed through the feminist standpoint theory lens, where the theory was enacted in the presentation of

those perceptions and used in the embedded interpretations and comments. The three phenomena explored in this research are; learning academic English in sex-separated EFL classrooms, communicating with the opposite in hypothetical mixed classrooms, and practicing translanguaging in EFL classrooms as a break from the standard academic English view.

All participants spoke about their writing course by referencing their engagement with instructors and materials of the course. Their perceptions about the course highlighted the fact that the living human experience can be different even under the same environments and in the same contexts, but also can be similar. A downside of the class in the eyes of a student is considered an upside in the eyes of another. For example, Eman and Reem were taking the academic writing course at the same time with the same instructor, but one saw the instructor's outside of class duties as making students suffer with the class, while the other did not see it as an influence at all. However, both female participants agreed that the instructor did not engage students with active in-class activities.

With the participants' perceptions of being in a sex-separated classroom, as indicated earlier, most participants did not identify this class format as something exceptional nor unique since all their education has been in this format. However, most of them acknowledged the fact that being separated from the opposite sex will probably not be their experience in future employment, which might form an obstacle for them in those situations. This has opened the conversation for them to think through a hypothetical situation in which classes become mixed to capture their perceptions about these possible mixed classes. In this conversation, male participants were less enthusiastic and more conservative than female participants. Both females and males thought of some possible positive and negative implications that might result from the switch from separated to mixed. These implications will not only influence students' educational

experience, but also social experience. For example, an important point that came up as positive is the exposure to dealing with the opposite sex early in college, so they understand them better which might influence their personal and social life. This point was brought up specifically by multiple female participants, such as Eman, who thought that not understanding the opposite sex is the reason for the high divorce rates in Saudi Arabia. In addition, both females and males relatively agreed that the switch to mixed would be less controversial and complicated if it was done with the blessings of Saudi families, since they are the ones who would reject the switch the most citing Islam's position from mingling between the sexes.

Another point that came up in the conversation about communication with the opposite sex branch, is how male instructors appear to be less strict than female instructors. This was referred to by all the female participants as an observation they either experienced or heard of. Also, Ahmed, confirmed that during the pandemic the male section professors were "more flexible and tolerant than those in the female section," which shows that this is a theory everybody seems to confirm. The majority of females and males saw online communication methods as the best option currently to enhance the interaction between the male and the female branch, with most male participants viewing distance learning communication methods, such as Blackboard as the best method for possible mixed classes in the future.

Finally, when asking students about how the historical and cultural origins of academic English writing influence their learning attitudes in the EFL context, almost all participants did not show interest in this question. In other words, I was asking about whether or not they thought knowing the history of the standard academic English writing had influence over their learning of English. However, to most of them, this question is invalid to ask since they are still non-native speakers of English, who in their view have minimum to no influence over the language.



When I switched the question to ask about the influence of the origins over practicing the language as future employees, participants responses varied between some who thought that they would continue following what they learned in college because they didn't want to be the exception, and some who were more accepting of change, but there was still a lot of confusion there.

From that beginning, I switched to a more extraordinary situation that challenges the history of standard academic writing. I explained to the participants a new teaching approach and concept in EFL studies called translanguaging, which embraces the native language of learners while learning English, and asked about their perceptions of it. The general vibe was excitement about the concept, and how both participants did recognize it being used in their English learning classes nor in their writing course of focus. However, talking to participants, I noticed an interesting fact which is that forms of translanguaging are being used informally and regularly in the male section, but not the female section. Most female participants reported that they personally translate class related writings from Arabic to English all the time, but always outside the class because their female instructors strictly refuse that they speak or write in Arabic. However, the situation did not seem as intense in the male section. The majority of male participants reported that although they don't necessarily use Arabic in writing assignments they do for some aspects of the class, but this does not mean that their instructors refuse that they use it to write in class. For example, Khaled referred that multiple instructors advise students to write what they want to say in Arabic, then translate it to English. This is quite significant as it doesn't represent what the females experienced.

### **Major Findings of The Research**

With this brief overview of the research, it is important to outline the major findings of

this research:

- 1- The discrepancies that female and male students experience between society and higher education is quite important, as they are separated in higher education, but not that much in daily life in society.
- 2- The structure of separated-sex classrooms could negatively influence students' education, especially female students.
- 3- There is an absence of active in-class activities and assignments, regardless of section, in a class that has academic English writing as its focus.
- 4- Unclear or unorganized class materials and resources that make students struggle to accomplish assignments.
- 5- Students' enthusiasm and engagement in the class are tied to the instructor's engagement, specifically female students.
- 6- The tolerance of male instructors with assignments and evaluation is highly observed.
- 7- Instructors focus on grammar and spelling as the most important aspects of writing regardless of sex, while setting aside other aspects of writing.
- 8- Female instructors limit writing topics choices for major assignments, so female students have less freedom in topic choice.
- 9- Female students are expected to meet high standards set for them by female and male instructors, while male students are not expected to do the same.
- 10- The educational and social outcomes of mixed-sex classrooms in higher education could prove its benefit over sex-separated classrooms.
- 11- The switch to mixed-sex classrooms could gradually happen by starting with online mixed classrooms.

12- There is a lack of interest in the historical and cultural origins of academic English writing.

13- Students, regardless of sex, view themselves as non-native speakers of English who have minimum to no influence over the English language.

14- The Arabic language is already in use by male students while learning English with the support of some male instructors.

15- Arabic is banned from the female section classes as instructed by female instructors, even though many female students use it unofficially in their note taking writing.

### **Responding to the Research Questions**

#### **Q1 How do students (female and male) experience writing instruction in English as a foreign language classroom?**

From the study, it was evident that their experiences are different but similar at the same time. This is noticed not just across branches, but also in the same classes with the same instructors. Generally speaking, in both branches, there is absence of in-class English writing activities, and the focus is on grammar and spelling. This was indicated by previous research as well. Miriam Alkubaidi (2017) describes how writing was perceived in her Saudi research that focused on writing saying, “writing, according to both teachers and learners, is perceived merely as a representation of grammatical rules and structure. It does not act as an authentic means of communication.” (p.244)

#### **Q2 What are the students’ perceptions about being in sex-separated writing courses and mixed-sex classes?**

Varying perceptions about sex-separated classes versus mixed-sex classes were indicated by both participants in chapter 5 of the dissertation. The most important point highlighted is the

educational and social implications of mixed-sex classes that could indicate possible benefits in this class format that exceeds the separated one. Since the rejection of such classes is mostly coming from the older generation (the parents' generation), there needs to be a plan to have them on board in support of this class format. Also, since most participants indicated Islam's stance on mingling between the sexes (Ikhtilat,) as the reason for rejection of mixed-sex classrooms, there needs to be a clear and precise identification of Islam's stance from Ikhtilat in the higher educational level, especially that it is already happening in the career level.

**Q3 How does students' awareness of the historical and cultural origins of academic English language influence their attitudes about learning to write English?**

As indicated earlier, participants had no interest in the history and cultural origin of the academic English language. Most participants viewed themselves as having no influence over English since it is not their native language. Therefore, no significance influence of the history over participants' attitudes learning to write English.

**Q4 What are the experiences of female and male Saudi EFL students with translanguaging in sex-separated writing courses?**

Although translanguaging is not used in its official and formal form in either branch, most male students have reported some forms of translanguaging in use in the EFL classrooms in the male section, while all female students have reported the alienation of Arabic in their section. This could mean that Canagarajah's (2011a) Saudi female student's use of Arabic with French and English in her writing is something that we cannot attribute to her educational background, since female students are deterred from using Arabic.

**Implications for this Research on Saudi Higher Education**

The implications of this research targets two audiences, higher education policy makers

including Saudi universities administrations, and higher education faculty. The findings of this research highly recommend the implementation of mixed-sex classes in higher education classes, and EFL classes specifically. The Saudi Vision 2030 states that the development of the country will only happen with the equal dynamic participation of men and women alike. Therefore, the communication between the two should be flexible and effective, and this will happen when the social barrier between the two sexes is eliminated. The outcomes of mixed-sex classrooms in higher education exceeds the goal of learning in a college classroom to cover a cultural goal that fulfills a social necessity, the goal of facilitating female and male communication outside the classroom in professional and social life. Also, the possible benefit of having mixed faculty that teach English to mixed students could show in diverse teaching approaches and evaluation methods. However, the shift needs to be strategic and recognize all the voices in favor of separation. One important point to consider is clarifying Islam's stance for this classroom structure, especially given that Ikhtilat may be experienced in careers later in life.

Beyond that, instructors need to give students freedom to express their opinions in the classroom as long as it doesn't touch on any socially defined taboo topics. and this extends to freedom to write in topics they find interesting. Implementing active classroom activities that go beyond lecturing and traditional instruction also needs to happen. Some could be done online or remotely with active participation by both female and male students. For classes that teach academic English language and research writing, it is necessary to provide students with helpful resources and to demonstrate how to navigate these resources. One of the recommendations is providing students with access to online libraries for as long as they are students and showing them how to access these libraries. One example is the Saudi Digital Library (SDL), which is one of the most helpful academic resource websites in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia specifically and the world in general is changing to be more tolerant and accepting of the other and embracing difference. This has extended to EFL instruction, in which the language of the learner is no longer being alienated from the classroom. Therefore, English departments and EFL centers in Saudi Arabia need to follow this by implementing the use of Arabic in English instruction. Instructors should not force students to communicate only in English but give them the option to communicate in Arabic. Multiple research projects done in the Saudi context identify English students as having low language proficiency level. Also, many of the participants in this research address their language skills as less than expected of them as English majors. So, why not use Arabic to teach them English and build that base of confidence in them before we start requesting, they communicate in English only? Therefore, using hybrid methods that do not need to be strictly in English, could be the answer, giving students the chance to integrate Arabic in their writing too. Students should not be held to very high expectations when it comes to language just because they are English majors. Being an English major does not mean that your language must be scrutinized all the time. In fact, using Arabic in activities that are done in-class and off-class could give students the encouragement and the enthusiasm they need to acquire English properly.

It is important to note that this project brings the perceptions of specific female and male students from a specific department in a specific university. Students from other departments or other universities or programs could have vastly different opinions than the ones covered in this study. Therefore, future research should focus on navigating the perceptions of female and male students around their experiences in the different sex-separated classes in different institutes, to investigate how these classes are run and how knowledge construction looks, and whether or not female students experience the same quality of education as the male students, and the same

inequalities as the females in this study. Also, future research should gain more insight into how students from other departments and other institutes view mixed-sex education and whether or not they see an advantage from it.

### **A Final Thought**

Ahmad Alhazmi's (2015) study that investigated the transitioning of Saudi students to mixed-sex environments abroad writes about sex separation in Saudi Arabia saying "it is a culture-, politics-, and ideology-based practice that has influenced the structure of Saudi Arabian society. Moving from this particular context to any other context where the genders mix freely might be a large transition." (p.55) This discourse has significantly changed since the new and exciting changes happening in the Saudi context. Today, men and women share multiple social domains where mixing occurs, and higher education could soon be one of those domains, especially that there are multiple benefits to it that outweigh the drawbacks. Therefore, it is important to know how to handle such a change in higher education, especially in the English language classroom. Since both female and male students would come to this new situation with opposite and similar educational experiences, and preconceived notions of the new situation, it is key to consider what both students bring. As indicated in this project, it is essential that the standpoint of the Saudi female student in particular be considered as it was proven to be of very significance especially in the conversation focusing on social interaction.

وما توفيقى إلا بالله

## **APPENDICES**



## Appendix A: A Letter to Taif University to Conduct the Research in Arabic

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

وفقه الله

إلى سعادة مدير جامعة الطائف المكلف أ.د. سعد الزهراني

أنا الطالبة رنا صالح السعدي (رقم الهوية ) المبتعثه على برنامج خادم الحرمين الشريفين والمرشحة لنيل درجة الدكتوراه في تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية من كلية الآداب في جامعة داكوتا الشمالية (University of North Dakota) بالولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. أُرغب بإجراء بحث الدكتوراه في قسم اللغات الأجنبية - اللغة الإنجليزية (طلاب وطالبات) في كلية الآداب في جامعة الطائف تحت عنوان: "تجارب طلاب وطالبات قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في مادة الكتابة في نظام التعليم المنفصل لشطري الذكور والإناث في جامعة الطائف".

(The Experiences of Male and Female English-major Students in Gender Separated English Writing Course at Taif University)

أمل من سعادتكم قبول طلبي لإجراء بحثي وتسهيل هذه الرحلة العلمية.

شاكراً ومقدرة لكم تعاونكم.

المبتعثه | رنا صالح السعدي

التوقيع: Rana

التاريخ: ١٤٤١/٦/٢٠

27/1/2020

## Appendix B: Dissertation Chair Letter to Facilitate Researcher's Mission



UND.edu

October 14, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

**Department of English**  
Merrifield Hall Room 110  
276 Centennial Drive Stop 7209  
Grand Forks, ND 58202-7209  
Phone: 701.777.3321  
Fax: 701.777.2373  
Email: [english@UND.edu](mailto:english@UND.edu)

This letter confirms that **Rana Alsaadi** is currently enrolled in our Ph.D. program in English at the University of North Dakota. I am Ms. Alsaadi's academic advisor and dissertation chair. Ms. Alsaadi has completed all of her coursework and successfully proposed her dissertation project, a qualitative study of the teaching and learning of writing in the English as a Foreign Language classroom in the Saudi university context.

Ms. Alsaadi plans to conduct her research at Taif University in Saudi Arabia during the first half of 2020. I anticipate that her in-country research will take three to six months.

Please contact me if further clarification is needed concerning Ms. Alsaadi's project. My contact information is below.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Kim Donehower'.

Kim Donehower, Ph.D.  
Professor of English  
[kim.donehower@und.edu](mailto:kim.donehower@und.edu)  
+1-701-777-4162

Appendix C: Approval letter from Taif University in Arabic

VISION رؤية 2030  
المملكة العربية السعودية  
KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

وكيل الجامعة  
للدراستات العليا  
والبحث العلمي

TU  
جامعة الطائف  
TAIF UNIVERSITY  
(٠٤١)

سعادة الملحق الثقافي بأمريكا  
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته...  
سلمة الله

نفيد سعادتك بان المبتعثة / رنا صالح منيف السعدي رقم هويه رقم جواز  
قد تقدمت بطلب لجامعة الطائف يتضمن رغبتها في الموافقة على اجراء رحله علميه  
لإكمال بحثها بعنوان  
"تجارب طلاب وطالبات قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في مادة الكتابة في نظام التعليم المنفصل لشطري الذكور  
والاناث في جامعة الطائف"  
وعليه نفيد سعادتك بان ليس لدينا مانع بحصول المبتعثة على الرحلة العلمية  
نأمل من سعادتك الاطلاع واتخاذ ما تروونه مناسب

وتقبلوا فائق التقدير والتحيّة،،،

وكيل الجامعة  
للدراستات العليا والبحث العلمي  
د. سعد بن سالم الزهراني

www.tu.edu.sa

المملكة العربية السعودية - وزارة التعليم  
الطائف . الحوية . ص ب ٨٨٨ الرمز البريدي ٢١٧٤  
هاتف: ٠٢٧٢٧٢٠٢٠ فاكس ٠٢٧٢٧٢٣٩٩

جامعة الطائف  
WWW.TU.EDU.SA  
رقم المسائل: ٢٢١٥ علم  
تاريخ المسائل: ٢١/٠٦/٠٤  
نوع المرفق: لا يوجد  
الرقم  
الموضوع

## Appendix D: IRB Approval



DIVISION OF RESEARCH & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

UND.edu

**Research Compliance & Ethics**  
Tech Accelerator, Suite 2050  
4201 James Ray Dr Stop 7134  
Grand Forks, ND 58202-7134  
Phone: 701.777.4279  
Fax: 701.777.2193

March 4, 2020

<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Rana Alsaadi
<b>Project Title:</b>	The Experiences of Male and Female Saudi English Major Students in EFL Writing Courses; Male and Female Perceptions Regarding Learning English Writing in Gender-Separated Education
<b>IRB Project Number:</b>	IRB-202003-225
<b>Project Review Level:</b>	Expedited 6
<b>Date of IRB Approval:</b>	03/03/2020
<b>Expiration Date of This Approval:</b>	03/02/2021
<b>Consent Form Approval Date:</b>	03/03/2020

The application form and all included documentation for the above-referenced project have been reviewed and approved via the procedures of the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Attached is your original consent form that has been stamped with the UND IRB approval and expiration dates. Please maintain this original on file. **You must use this original, stamped consent form to make copies for participant enrollment. No other consent form should be used.** It must be signed by each participant prior to initiation of any research procedures. In addition, each participant must be given a copy of the consent form.

Prior to implementation, submit any changes to or departures from the protocol or consent form to the IRB for approval. No changes to approved research may take place without prior IRB approval.

You have approval for this project through the above-listed expiration date. When this research is completed, please submit a termination form to the IRB. If the research will last longer than one year, an annual review and progress report must be submitted to the IRB prior to the submission deadline to ensure adequate time for IRB review.

The forms to assist you in filing your project termination, annual review and progress report, adverse event/unanticipated problem, protocol change, etc. may be accessed on the IRB website: <http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/>

Sincerely,

Michelle L. Bowles, M.P.A., CIP  
IRB Manager

MLB/sy  
Enclosures

Cc: Kim Donehower, Ph.D.

Appendix E: Consent Forms in English and Arabic with IRB stamp

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Project Title:** The Experiences of Male and Female Saudi English Major Students in EFL Writing Courses: Male and Female Perceptions Regarding Learning English Writing in Gender-Separated Education.

**Principal Investigator:** Rana Alsaadi

**Phone/Email Address:** rana.alsaadi@und.edu

**Department:** English

**Research Advisor:** Kim Donehower

**Research Advisor**

**Phone/Email Address:** +1.701.777.4162/ kim.donehower@und.edu

**What should I know about this research?**

- Someone will explain this research to you.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- If you don't take part, it won't be held against you.
- You can take part now and later drop out, and it won't be held against you.
- If you don't understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

**How long will I be in this research?**

We expect that your taking part in this research will last between an hour and fifty minutes to three hours and twenty minutes total.

**Why is this research being done?**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the experiences of male and female Saudi English major students in English writing courses, and to qualitatively document and analyze the students' perceptions of the roles gender might play in their English writing acquisition and experiences.

**What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?**

If you decide to take part in this research study, you will be given two copies of the consent form, one is in Arabic and the other is in English. You will be asked to sign both copies of the consent form. Then, you will be given a copy of your signed consent form. After that, you will sit down with the interviewer, in person or via Skype, in a private place on Taif University's campus and the interview will start. Please note that the interview will be audio recorded for the

Approval Date:	MAR 3 2020
Expiration Date:	MAR 2 2021
University of North Dakota IRB	

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

research purpose. Recordings will be stored in a password-protected folder and file names will not indicate the names of participants. All participants in this study will be given pseudonyms. You can skip any question that you don't feel comfortable answering. The time for the interview should take between 30-90 minutes. There might be potential follow-up interview(s) at another day, these might take between 30-60 minutes. At the end, you will be contacted to check in with you and to gather your opinion of the research results, this should take around 30 minutes.

**Could being in this research hurt me?**

There are no expected risks as a result of participating in this research. However, you can stop the interview or ask to change the question at any time.

**Will being in this research benefit me?**

The Saudi 2030 Vision, and current social and economic changes, open up the possibility for mixed-gender classrooms in the future. This research offers you an opportunity to process your thoughts about mixed-gender classrooms since you have only experienced gender-separated education. As an English major, you are likely to be a future teacher of English, perhaps in mixed-gender classrooms, so it offers teachers and researchers data to consider classroom implications if classrooms to become mixed-gender.

Also, this research should give you a chance as a student to feel more in charge of your learning process and your education by giving your opinion and experience in a writing course that might be invisible to your instructors, especially your opinion about implementing your native language Arabic into the English writing courses in Taif University.

**How many people will participate in this research?**

Approximately [10] people will take part in this study at Taif University; ideally, 5 male and 5 female. English instructors may also provide contextual information about English classes.

**Will it cost me money to take part in this research?**

You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

**Will I be paid for taking part in this research?**

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

**Who is funding this research?**

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

**What happens to information collected for this research?**

Your private information may be shared with individuals and organizations that conduct or watch over this research, including:

- The Institutional Review Board (IRB) that reviewed this research

Approval Date:	<u>MAR 3 2020</u>
Expiration Date:	<u>MAR 2 2021</u>
University of North Dakota IRB	

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

- The research advisor Dr. Kim Donehower.

We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential. We protect your information from disclosure to others to the extent required by law. We cannot promise complete secrecy.

Data collected in this research might be de-identified and used for future research or distributed to another investigator for future research without your consent.

Interviews will be audio recorded digitally and downloaded to the researcher's computer for transcription and analysis. If you wish, you may review the recording and transcript for accuracy. A back-up copy of all interviews will be kept on an external hard drive, which is password protected. Once the project is completed, all audio files except the back-up hard drive will be deleted. The single back-up hard drive copy will be kept for the duration of the researcher's career, and then deleted.

#### **What if I agree to be in the research and then change my mind?**

If you decide to leave the study early, we ask that you call or email or send a WhatsApp message to the researcher. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Taif University.

#### **Who can answer my questions about this research?**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt you or made you sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board ("IRB"). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at +1 (701) 777-4279 or [UND.ibr@UND.edu](mailto:UND.ibr@UND.edu) if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You may also visit the UND IRB website for more information about being a research subject: <http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.html>

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Approval Date:	<u>MAR 3 2020</u>
Expiration Date:	<u>MAR 2 2021</u>
University of North Dakota IRB	

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject Initials: \_\_\_\_\_





جامعة داكوتا الشمالية  
الموافقة على المشاركة في بحث

عنوان البحث: تجارب طلاب وطالبات قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في مادة الكتابة في نظام التعليم المنفصل لشطري الذكور والإناث في جامعة الطائف.

الباحث الرئيسي: رنا صالح السعدي

رقم الهاتف/ الإيميل: rana.alsaadi@und.edu

القسم: اللغة الإنجليزية

مشرقة البحث: الدكتورة كيم دونهور

رقم الهاتف/ الإيميل: kim.donohewer@und.edu / 0017017774162

ماذا يتوجب علي معرفته بشأن هذا البحث؟

- سوف يقوم شخص بشرح هذا البحث لك.
- مشاركتك في هذا البحث تطوعيه، اختيار مشاركتك من عدمه متروك لك.
- إذا اخترت عدم المشاركة لن يترتب عليك أي عواقب.
- تستطيع المشاركة في البحث الآن وتغيير رأيك لاحقاً بدون أن يترتب عليك أي عواقب.
- إذا لم تفهم أمر معين بإمكانك السؤال.
- قبل أن تتخذ قرارك في المشاركة أو عدمها اسأل كل الأسئلة التي تدور في بالك.

كم ستكون مدة مشاركتي في هذا البحث؟

نتوقع بأن تكون مدة مشاركتك في هذا البحث من ساعة وخمسين دقيقة إلى ثلاث ساعات وعشرين دقيقة.

لماذا يتم عمل هذا البحث؟

الغرض من هذا البحث هو معرفة تجارب طلاب تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية الذكور والإناث في مادة الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية وتوثيق وتحليل تصورات الطلاب حول الأدوار التي قد يلعبها الفصل من عدمه في اكتسابهم لمهارة وخبرة الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية.

ماذا سيحصل لي إذا وافقت على المشاركة في هذا البحث؟

إذا وافقت على المشاركة في هذا البحث سوف تحصل على نسختين من نموذج الموافقة على المشاركة في البحث، واحدة باللغة العربية والأخرى باللغة الإنجليزية وسيطلب منك التوقيع على النسختين وستحصل على نسخة من نموذج الموافقة الذي وقعته.

بعد ذلك سوف تجلس مع الباحث في مكان خاص في حرم جامعة الطائف وستبدأ المقابلة.

يرجى ملاحظة أنه سيتم تسجيل المقابلة صوتياً وذلك لغرض بحثي تام. سيتم تخزين التسجيلات في مجلد محمي بكلمة مرور ولن تشير أسماء الملفات إلى أسماء المشاركين في البحث. سيتم إعطاء جميع المشاركين في هذه الدراسة أسماء مستعارة.

إذا كنت لا ترغب الإجابة عن أي سؤال يمكنك الامتناع عن ذلك.

قد يستغرق وقت المقابلة ما ٣٠ دقيقة إلى ساعة ونصف.

قد تكون هناك مقابلة (أو مقابلات) متابعة محتملة في يوم آخر، وقد تستغرق ما بين ٣٠ دقيقة إلى ساعة.

أخيراً، سيتم الاتصال بك لاحقاً لأخذ رأيك حول نتائج البحث سيستغرق هذا حوالي ٣٠ دقيقة.

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هل يحتمل أن تؤذي المشاركة في هذا البحث؟  
لا توجد مخاطر متوقعة نتيجة المشاركة في هذا البحث. وبالرغم من ذلك يمكنك إيقاف المقابلة أو تغيير السؤال في أي وقت ترغب.

هل ستفيدني المشاركة في هذا البحث؟  
رؤية السعودية 2030 والتغيرات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية الحالية تفتح الباب أمام إمكانية وجود فصول دراسية مختلطة بين الجنسين في المستقبل. لذلك يتيح لك هذا البحث فرصة التفكير في الفصول الدراسية المختلطة وما تعتقده من تأثيرها في تعليم اللغة خاصة بأنك لم تجرب سوى التعليم المنفصل. كذلك بصفتك طالب متخصص في اللغة الإنجليزية، من المحتمل أن تكون مطلعاً للغة الإنجليزية في المستقبل، ربما في الفصول الدراسية المختلطة، لذلك فهذا البحث يوفر لك كمعلم مستقبلي وللباحثين معلومات قد تُعدهم لتطبيقها في الفصول الدراسية.  
أيضاً كطالب يمكنك هذا البحث فرصة مسؤوليتك عن تعليمك وعن عملية التعلم الخاصة بك وذلك خلال إبداء رأيك والتحدث عن تجربتك في مادة الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية، هذه التجربة التي قد تكونت غير واضحة لمعلميك. خاصة رأيك حول استخدام لغتك الأم (اللغة العربية) في مادة الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة الطائف.

كم عدد الأشخاص المشاركين في هذا البحث؟  
تقريباً ١٠ أشخاص من جامعة الطائف سيشاركون في هذا البحث. تقريباً ٥ ذكور و ٥ إناث.

هل المشاركة في هذا البحث ستكونني المال؟  
أنت لن تحصل أي تكاليف مادية مقابل المشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية.

هل سيتم الدفع لي مقابل المشاركة في هذا البحث؟  
لن يتم الدفع لك مقابل المشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية.

من يمول هذا البحث؟  
لا تتلقى جامعة داكوتا الشمالية وفريق البحث أي مدفوعات من وكالات أو منظمات أو شركات أخرى لإجراء هذه الدراسة البحثية.

ماذا يحدث للمعلومات التي يتم جمعها لهذا البحث؟  
من المحتمل مشاركة معلوماتك الخاصة مع الأفراد والمؤسسات التي تجري هذا البحث أو تراقبه وهم:

- مجلس المراجعة المؤسسية (IRB) والذي راجع هذا البحث.
- مشرفة البحث الدكتورة كيم دونهاور.

قد ننشر نتائج هذا البحث ومع ذلك سنحافظ على سرية اسمك ومعلومات التعريف الأخرى الخاصة بك وسنحمي معلوماتك من الإفصاح بها للأخرين بالقدر الذي يقتضيه القانون ولكن لا يمكننا أن نعدك بسرية تامة.

قد يتم استخدام البيانات التي تم جمعها في هذا البحث بدون معلومات شخصية لإجراء أبحاث مستقبلية أو إعطاءها لباحث آخر لإجراء أبحاث مستقبلية دون موافقتك.

سيتم تسجيل المقابلات الصوتية رقمياً وتنزيلها على كمبيوتر الباحث للنسخ والتحليل. إذا كنت ترغب يمكنك مراجعة التسجيل والنسخة المكتوبة للتأكد من دقتها. سيتم الاحتفاظ بنسخة احتياطية من جميع المقابلات على قرص صلب خارجي محمي بكلمة

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مرور. بمجرد اكتمال المشروع سيتم حذف جميع الملفات الصوتية باستثناء الموجودة على القرص الاحتياطي سيتم الاحتفاظ بنسخة احتياطية واحدة طوال فترة حياة الباحث المهنية ثم يتم حذفها.  
ماذا لو وافقت على المشاركة في البحث ثم غيرت رأيي؟

إذا قررت ترك المشاركة في البحث مبكراً، فنحن نطلب منك الإتصال أو إرسال بريد إلكتروني أو إرسال رسالة WhatsApp إلى الباحث.  
مشاركتك تطوعية بالكامل يمكنك إختيار عدم المشاركة أو يمكنك إيقاف مشاركتك في أي وقت دون غرامة أو فقدان المزايا التي يحق لك الحصول عليها. لن يؤثر قرارك أو عدم مشاركتك على علاقتك الحالية أو المستقبلية مع جامعة الطائف.

من يمكنه الإجابة على أسئلتني حول هذا البحث؟

إذا كانت لديك أسئلة أو مخاوف أو شكوي أو كنت تعتقد أن هذا البحث قد أذك أو أمرضك ، أخبر فريق البحث على رقم الهاتف المذكور أعلاه في الصفحة الأولى.  
يشرف على هذا البحث مجلس المراجعة المؤسسية ("IRB") وهم مجموعة من الأشخاص يقومون بمراجعة مستقلة للدراسات البحثية والذين يمكنك التحدث إليهم على رقم الهاتف ٠٠١٧٠١٧٧٧٤٢٧٩ أو على الإيميل [UND.irb@UND.edu](mailto:UND.irb@UND.edu) في الحالات التالية:

- يكون لديك أسئلة أو مخاوف أو شكوي لا يتم الرد عليها من قبل فريق البحث.
- لا تحصل على إجابات من فريق البحث
- لا يمكنك الوصول إلى فريق البحث.
- تريد التحدث إلى شخص آخر حول البحث.
- لديك أسئلة حول حقوقك كمشارك في البحث.
- يمكنك أيضاً زيارة موقع UND IRB على الانترنت للحصول على مزيد من المعلومات حول كونك مشارك في بحث: <https://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.html>

يوثق توقيعك موافقتك على المشاركة في هذا البحث. سوف تتلقى نسخة من هذا النموذج.

إسم المشارك: \_\_\_\_\_

توقيع المشارك \_\_\_\_\_ التاريخ \_\_\_\_\_

لقد ناقشت النقاط المذكورة أعلاه مع المشارك أو مع الممثل المفوض قانونياً لهذا الموضوع حيثما كان ذلك مناسباً

توقيع الشخص الحاصل على الموافقة \_\_\_\_\_ التاريخ \_\_\_\_\_

التاريخ \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Appendix F: The Research Semi-Structured Interview Questions

### The Basic Script for the Semi-Structured Interviews

“The Experiences of Male and Female Saudi English Major Students in EFL Writing Courses: Male and Female Perceptions Regarding Learning English Writing in Gender-Separated Education”

Principal Investigator: Rana Alsaadi

The interview is structured around a number of topics that generally focus on the experience of the student in the writing course they are enrolled in and the type of changes that might occur in it in the future.

Topics that will be discussed include: students’ perception of the current class they are enrolled in, the writing instruction they are exposed to, their realization of the history behind the English academic writing system and how it was established by white males, the connection with other gender branch, view of single gender classes, view of mixed gender classes, and translanguaging and its use in current gender separated writing courses and in predicted future mixed gender classes.

For each topic, my practice is to ask a very general starting question to try to get the participant to recall as much detail as possible. I then ask follow-up questions, based on what the participant says, to try to get more details. With some participants I have to ask very few follow-up questions, with others I must ask more.

Below is the basic script for the interview, with examples of the types of follow-up questions I might ask in each section of the interview

#### Information About the Interview

Interviewer: Usually this interview takes about an hour, but we can stop at any point if you get tired.

In this first section I will ask you about the writing course that you are currently enrolled in. If at any time you don’t want to answer any of the questions, just tell me and I’ll move on to a different topic.

#### Current writing class experience

Interviewer: What year in your English major program are you? And what writing class are you taking? How would you describe that class? And the writing activities that you take? What type of writing is done in the class? What topics do you write about?

Possible Follow-Ups: What specific parts of the class that makes you feel this way about it?

Describe the advantages and disadvantages of being enrolled in the writing class.

What parts of the class need development or attention?

Who do you think needs to improve their performance? Instructor or students? Or someone else?

The second section is about the knowledge you have of the history of English writing.

#### English writing history

Interviewer: have you ever been exposed to the history of English writing? What do you know about the history of English writing? Describe your feelings about the fact that English academic writing was established by white males who do not look like us (the interviewer and student) and who are most likely native speakers of English or English is most likely their first language or mother-tongue language. How would this fact change (or not change) anything about your motivation to learn English writing?

Possible Follow-Ups: How might this fact influence your understanding of English writing? How might this fact influence your practice of the English writing as a student now and as a professional later in life? How might your awareness of this fact affect your attitude about learning to write in English? Would it be beneficial for other English major students to know about it? Why or why not?

The third part of the interview will be about how much do you think the writing class in your branch is in contact with the other branch of the university.

#### The female branch vs male branch

Interviewer: What do you think of having an instructor that teach both males and female sections of the writing course? Would his/her two classes differ? How so?

Describe the connection between your branch's writing class and the other branch's writing class.

Possible Follow-Ups: What would you suggest to make the connection to the other branch's class better? Why do you think the connection doesn't exist (or could use some improvement)?

The fourth part will be about your opinions about gender-separated writing classes and gender-mixed writing classes.

#### Gender-separated writing classes vs gender-mixed writing classes.

Interviewer: How much do you think being a woman or a man influence your learning of English? Learning of English writing?

How long have you been in gender-separated education? What are the benefits and disadvantages of being in gender-separated education? If we imagined that the setting of the classroom changed, and mixed-gender classrooms in higher education were implemented, what do you think of that? Think about it in an English writing class, what do you see?

Possible Follow-Ups: what possible benefits do you think a mixed-gender class would bring? What possible challenges?

Now, we will move to the last part of the interview which will focus on a new concept in English as a foreign language writing instruction called "translanguaging." Basically, and very briefly, this concept treats your own or native language as a treasure in the language classroom because it looks at it as a blessing you have. It emphasizes the use of your native language (in this case Arabic) in the English language classroom specifically in English writing, by giving you an open space to use Arabic in English writing.

#### Translanguaging

Interviewer: To what extent do you think this new concept is used in the writing class you are enrolled in? do you see any benefits from using it? Why or why not?

How do you see this concept being used by students from both genders?

Possible Follow-Ups: How often do you get to practice translanguaging in the writing classroom that you are in? Why do you think this concept is cherished in the writing course you are taking? Or why is it not given the needed attention? Would you prefer to use a concept like this? Why or why not? Do you think having gender-mixed classrooms would change anything about the use of this concept? Why or why not?

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Possible interview questions with the writing instructors:

I would like to ask you about information for the writing class you give, most of the questions would be contextual information about the class.

Interviewer: Describe the methods for teaching writing that you use in class. What influences the writings and the activities planned for classes?

Describe students' attitudes towards learning English writing.

Possible Follow-Ups: since you teach two sections one males the other is females, have you noticed any difference between the two branches? Are there specific topics that interest one gender more than the other? What are they?

Also, I would like to ask you about your opinion on possible gender-mixed classes in the future.

Interviewer: do you think the gender of students affect their English writing learning? Why or why not?

Describe how you see writing classes if they were become mixed-gender classes. What writing challenges and benefits you imagine would exist in gender mixed classes?

Possible Follow-Ups: Why do you think gender mixed classes are better? Why do you think gender separated classes are better?

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