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CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY SAUDI FEMALE STUDENTS IN
THE UNITED STATES**

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SOCIOCULTURAL AND ACADEMIC ACCULTURATION CHALLENGES
ENCOUNTERED BY SAUDI FEMALE STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

by

Samar Aldhahri

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

The University of Memphis

August 2019

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To my mother Khadijah Aldhahri

To the soul of my father Ali Aldhahri

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Abstract

Aldhahri, Samar. Ph.D. The University of Memphis. August, 2019. Sociocultural and academic acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States. Major Professor: Emily Thrush, Ph.D.

Coming from a completely different culture, Saudi female students encounter a number of challenges adapting to the American culture. These acculturation challenges may affect their academic, social, and life experiences in the United States. The purpose of this study was to explore the acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States and their strategies to cope with their challenges. The study also aimed to investigate the roles of participants' demographic variables and the historical changes in Saudi Arabia on their experiences in the United States. To achieve these objectives, a mixed methods research was adopted implementing an online survey and semi-structured interviews. Data were collected from 100 Saudi female students living and studying in different parts of the United States.

Results showed that social challenges were the most difficult acculturation challenge encountered by Saudi female students in the United States, followed by cultural challenges and familial obligations. Discrimination challenges, on the other hand, appeared to be the least challenging issue facing Saudi female students in the United States. Coping with their different challenges, Saudi female students adopted a variety of strategies that helped them adjust to their new environment. Exploring the role of Saudi female students' demographic variables on their acculturation challenges in the United States, participants' demographic variables of age, living in big city or small town, previous overseas experiences, educational level, English skills self-rating, and marital status seemed to significantly influence Saudi female students' experiences in the United States. However, there was no significant relationship between participants' acculturation challenges and their regions of origins in Saudi Arabia, regions of residence in the United States, length of residence in the United States, and children. For the effect of the recent

changes in Saudi Arabia on Saudi female students' experiences in the United States and the way they perceive themselves, a number of positive aspects and effects were highlighted by the participants such as the empowerment of Saudi women, gaining more freedom, receiving equal job opportunities, and becoming stronger, more confident, more independent, and more excited to work hard and go back to Saudi Arabia.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Living and studying abroad presents numerous challenges and difficulties to international students. For Saudi female international students in the United States, the acculturation and adjustment experiences are even more complicated and challenging due to the huge differences between the American and Saudi cultures and the role of women in these cultures. Since the 1970s, the Saudi government started to send its students to pursue their higher education in western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Since the beginning of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program in 2005, the number of international students arriving from Saudi Arabia in the United States increased dramatically. Taking this opportunity and making the decision to study in the United States, however, brings several challenges to Saudi students and Saudi female students in particular. These challenges Saudi female students encounter may negatively impact their academic progress, achievement, and their overall experiences. There is an urgent need to explore the experience of a Saudi female international student in the United States and the acculturation challenges involved, including (a) *Sociocultural Challenges*, such as social adjustment, different cultural traditions, making friends, engaging in the community, and balancing responsibilities; (b) *Language and Academic Challenges*, such as language barrier, different educational system, different teaching and learning styles, and academic support and (c) *Psychological Challenges*, such as culture shock, homesickness, stress, loneliness, and low self-esteem. To understand the unique experiences of Saudi female international students in the United States and the acculturation challenges they encounter, it is important to be aware of where those students come from, their educational backgrounds in Saudi Arabia, and the history of Saudi female international students in the United States. A literature review of the history of female education in Saudi Arabia and the history of

Saudi female international students in the United States will be provided in this study. The sociocultural, academic, and psychological acculturation challenges encountered by international students in general, and Saudi female students in particular will be also discussed.

Statement of the Problem

While previous research addressed the adaptation and adjustment challenges encountered by international students living and studying abroad (Brown & Holloway, 2008; David, Okazaki & Saw, 2009; Junzi, 2009; Misra & Castillo, 2004; Sovic, 2007), little is known about the unique acculturation difficulties facing Saudi female international students in the United States. The case of the acculturation process of Saudi female international students requires special attention as they are different from other international students due to the huge differences between the American and the Saudi cultures and the role of women in these cultures. Because of the restrictions on the women's role in Saudi Arabia, Saudi female international students in the United States face numerous challenges and difficulties adapting to the American culture. These challenges Saudi female students encounter may negatively impact their academic progress, achievement, and overall experiences. The aim of the present study was to explore the experiences of Saudi female students in the United States and the acculturation challenges they encounter, including sociocultural challenges (e.g. social adjustment, different cultural traditions, making friends, engaging in the community, and balancing responsibilities), language and academic challenges (e.g. language barrier, different educational system, different teaching and learning styles, and academic support), and psychological challenges (e.g. culture shock, homesickness, stress, loneliness, and low self-esteem). Awareness of the barriers and obstacles faced by Saudi female students in the United States may assist the host country, universities,

campus leaders, and international students' services increase their support, point those students to useful resources and services, and boost their academic success and cultural experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the acculturation challenges and adjustment difficulties encountered by Saudi female international students in the United States, including (a) *Sociocultural Challenges*, such as social adjustment, different cultural traditions, making friends, engaging in the community, and balancing responsibilities; (b) *Language and Academic Challenges*, such as language barrier, different educational system, different teaching and learning styles, and academic support and (c) *Psychological Challenges*, such as culture shock, homesickness, stress, loneliness, and low self-esteem. The investigation of how these students cope with their acculturation challenges will also be reviewed. The aim of the study was to explore whether the Saudi female students' backgrounds and demographic variables have any effect on the acculturation challenges they face. Another objective of the study was to investigate whether the historical changes the country of Saudi Arabia experienced during the last 2 years in the women's role have any influence on the Saudi female students' experiences in the United States and how they perceive themselves. A knowledge of these challenges may lead to better understanding of the unique experience of Saudi female international students in the United States and would hopefully result in greater support to foster their academic achievement as well as cultural experience.

Research Questions

The present study sought to answer four main research questions divided into two phases: quantitative and qualitative. The first research question aimed to investigate the acculturation

challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States. This research question was explored both quantitatively and qualitatively.

1. What are the sociocultural, academic, and psychological acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female international students in the United States?

The second research question presented the quantitative phase of the study and aimed to explore whether Saudi female students backgrounds affect the challenges they encountered. This research question was addressed quantitatively via an online survey:

2. Do the Saudi female students' backgrounds and demographic variables have any effect on the acculturation challenges they face?

The next two research questions were in the qualitative phase of the study and aimed to investigate in depth how Saudi female students cope with their acculturation challenges, and whether the historical changes the country of Saudi Arabia experienced during the last 2 years have any influence on their experiences. These two research questions were approached qualitatively through semi-structured interviews:

3. How do Saudi female international students cope with their acculturation challenges?
4. Do the historical changes the country of Saudi Arabia experienced during the last 2 years in the women's role have any influence on Saudi female students' experiences in the United States and how they perceive themselves?

Theoretical Framework

The present study and its research questions were built on three main theoretical frameworks; The Cultural Dimensions Theory, The Transition Theory, and The Culture Shock Theory. Those theoretical frameworks were also be used to guide the analysis of the study

findings and results. A discussion of the three theoretical frameworks used in this study is provided below.

The Cultural Dimensions Theory

The cultural dimensions theory was developed by Geert Hofstede (2001) as a framework for intercultural communication. The validity of this theory was tested in more than 70 countries around the world (Glowacki-Dudka, Usman, & Treff, 2008). According to Hofstede (2001), “Intercultural encounters are as old as humanity itself: they occurred as soon as two different tribes of humans met... such meetings may have been peaceful... or hostile” (p. 423). The author also believes that conflict in human’s life can be seen in all cultures, races, genders, and classes. One of the six dimensions included in this theory is individualism versus collectivism (Hofstede, 2001). While independence, self-reliance, competition, and pleasure seeking are the most important characteristics of the individualistic cultures, collectivistic cultures are more culturally independent, connected, and cooperated. Members of the individualistic cultures are supposed to take care of only themselves and their immediate families, whereas, people of the collectivistic cultures expect their relatives or members of their group to look after them in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). While individualism typically reflects western societies such as Europe and North America, eastern societies tend to be more collectivistic such as Saudi Arabia (Hofstede, 1991). This theory was used to guide the analysis of the results of the present study to better understand cultural differences and their influence on Saudi female students’ adjustment in the United States. The study may also be used to explain some of the cultural values and concepts of the American society that might challenge Saudi female students and lead to social and academic difficulties.

The Transition Theory

The transition theory was first introduced by Schlossberg (1983) and it emphasizes the transition experience of adults and how they react differently based on personal differences. As a result of transition, adults might be forced to change their roles, habits, and relationships (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). Transition is “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 33). These transitions can be either anticipated such as marriage, having a baby, getting a job, or travel, or unanticipated such as sickness, death, or losing a job. The adjustment of the anticipated transitions might be easier and faster than the unanticipated ones (Goodman et al. 2006). According to Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006), international students who experience transition may either grow or fail as a result of that transition and its consequences. The authors also identify three stages adults go through when they experience transition; *moving in*, *moving through*, and *moving out* (Goodman et al., 2006). The *moving in* stage is the first stage when people start a new life such as new role, new country, new responsibilities, new relationships, etc. (Goodman et al., 2006). The second stage, *moving through*, occurs when people experience mixed feelings as a result of their transition experiences and new practices (Goodman et al., 2006). The *moving out* stage is the third stage when people evaluate their new experiences (Goodman et al., 2006). During their transition experience and throughout the three stages, adults need to use coping resources to assist them in their adjustment process including situation, self, support, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006). These coping resources are also known as the four S factors that shape adults’ transition experience (Goodman et al., 2006). This theory may help understand the transition theory of Saudi female students when they first move to the United States (moving in stage), when they experience mixed feelings during their

transition experience (moving through stage), and when they evaluate their experiences in the third stage (moving out stage). The transition theory may also help explain the coping resources (situation, self, support, and strategies) Saudi female students in the United States use to assist them in their transition experience and adjustment process.

The Culture Shock Theory

The culture shock theory was first introduced by Oberg (1960) who explained the stress and frustration people experience as a result of unfamiliarity of what to do and uncertainty of what to expect when moving to a new country and or a new culture. According to Pedersen (1995), culture shock is defined as “any situation where an individual is forced to adjust to unfamiliar social system where previous learning no longer applies” (p. 1). Moving to a new country, people may need to adjust to new language, culture, values, and expectations. Adjusting to the new situation, they may experience what is called *culture shock* and may go through five stages of culture shock; *the honeymoon stage*, *the disintegration stage*, *the reintegration stage*, *the autonomy stage*, and *the interdependence stage* (Pedersen, 1995).

The five stages of culture shock and their descriptions according to Pedersen, 1995 are; *the honeymoon stage* occurs when people first arrive in a new culture and experience feelings of curiosity and excitement. Spending some more time in the new culture, people may start feeling confused, isolated, and in need for family and friends, and experience what is called *the disintegration stage*. In *the reintegration stage*, people may feel frustrated and reject the new culture and may also reconnect with their home culture and value it in comparison. As time moves on, people may experience *the autonomy stage* when they start to accept the new culture and all the differences involved by coping with their new lives and appreciating their new experiences. In *the interdependence stage*, people may start feeling comfortable and confident

again as they begin to understand the differences and similarities between the new culture and their home culture and appreciate them. People may also start to enjoy their new lives and experiences in the new culture. This theory was used to navigate the culture shock stages Saudi female students may go through when living and studying in the United States and how it may affect their social and academic experiences. The theory was also used to better understand how those students react to the different stages and what strategies they use to help them in their adjustment process.

Significance of the Study

As the most conservative country around the world, female international students coming from Saudi Arabia to the United States face numerous challenges adapting to the American culture. These acculturation challenges may negatively impact their academic progress as well as their cultural experience. Due to the huge differences between the Saudi and American cultures, and in the women's role in these cultures, the unique experience of Saudi female international students in the United States needs to be explored and highlighted. Despite the growing number of Saudi female international students in the United States, however, there is a lack of research addressing their challenges, their needs, and their unique experiences. The aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of Saudi female international students who live and study in the United States and explore the acculturation challenges they encounter. Being aware of their experiences and the challenges that they face would help the host country, universities, campus leaders, and international students' services increase their support and foster those students' academic success and cultural experience. Such an understanding and support may lead to better academic, social, and cultural experiences for those students.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

The current study was limited to Saudi female students in the United States and the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other populations. The sample of this study included 100 Saudi female students. Those participants presented a variety of backgrounds including; age groups, regions of origin in Saudi Arabia, regions of residence in the United States, some lived in big cities while others in small towns, had different length of residence in the United States, had different past overseas experiences, presented different educational levels, different levels of English skills self-ratings, different marital status, and some had children while others did not.

The data gathered from the participants were self-reported and collected through online survey and semi-structured interviews. There were no observations or language tests included as the main purpose was to explore the experiences of Saudi female students in the United States and the acculturation challenges they encounter from their own perceptions and opinions.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic and presents the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, and the limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter 1 will also discuss the theoretical framework that will guide the analysis of the results of this study. Chapter 2 provides a literature review of the history of female education in Saudi Arabia, the history of Saudi female students in the United States, previous research on Saudi female students in the United States, and the acculturation challenges faced by international students including sociocultural, language and academic, and psychological challenges. Chapter 3 will be used to explain the research methods used in this study and presents in detail the research design, the participants, data collection and procedures, and data analysis. While Chapter 4 will be used to present,

analyze, and discuss the quantitative data obtained from the online survey, Chapter 5 will be used to present, analyze, and discuss the qualitative data gathered from the interviews. Chapter 6 will be used to summarize the research findings and provides research implications and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To understand the unique experiences of Saudi female international students in the United States and the acculturation challenges they encounter, it is important to be aware of these students' educational backgrounds in Saudi Arabia and the history of Saudi female international students in the United States. Chapter 2 provides a literature review of the history of female education in Saudi Arabia and how it first started and developed over the years. The history of Saudi female international students in the United States will be reviewed first to unveil the previous research regarding Saudi female students in the United States, emphasizing the research gap the present study aims to fill. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of the acculturation challenges encountered by international students in general, and Saudi female students in particular. Those adjustment difficulties include the sociocultural, academic, and psychological acculturation challenges.

History of Female Education in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, students are offered free education from elementary stage through higher education. According to the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education (2017), the main goal of education in Saudi Arabia is to promote and develop students' knowledge and skills to build, develop, and serve their country. In 1949, schools were opened in Saudi Arabia but were limited to only males (Al-Abdulkareem, 2012). In the 1950s, a group of educated, middle-class Saudi men criticized the Saudi educational system and called for equal education opportunities for girls (Al Munajjed, 1997). Their claim stressed their needs to marry educated Saudi women who would help them build a modern and educated family and emphasized that not having educated Saudi women would push them to marry educated women from other neighboring Arab countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq (Al Munajjed, 1997).

In 1959, Saudi females were finally allowed to attend schools, when King Saud bin Abdul-Aziz issued a decree building schools for girls (Al-Abdulkareem, 2012). The first Saudis who supported this decision, according to Al-Khateeb (1998), were upper-class, educated Saudi men who immediately started to send their daughters to schools. Even before the girls' schools were opened in Saudi Arabia, those educated families did not hesitate to send their daughters to study abroad in neighboring countries such as Egypt and Lebanon (Al-Khateeb, 1998). Hamdan (2005) indicated educated Saudi men and women who studied abroad returned to Saudi Arabia with new hopes for change and new visions for the future. Many educated people in Saudi Arabia support women's rights and believed that they should be given equal education and job opportunities (Al Remailh, 2016).

Other conservatives, on the other hand, refuse and resist any change or progress on issues related to women's rights, as they see it as a movement toward what they call "the Westernization of women" (Al Remailh, 2016). These groups of conservatives attack anyone who supports women's rights and describe them as secularists, liberals, and Western agents (Al Remailh, 2016). Despite the restrictions on Saudi women's role in the country and the continuous resistance to any change and progress, Hamdan (2005) believed educated, open-minded Saudis would make a difference and lead the country to a great change and progress. The author emphasized, however, that such a change needs time and patience. With the frequent attempts for change from educated, open-minded Saudis, and the continuous resistance to it from conservative, religious Saudis, Al Remailh (2016) asserted any progress in women's rights "will be at the center of a conflict between modernity and tradition in Saudi Arabia" (p. 10).

In 1960, when public schools for girls were first opened, Islamic conservatives claimed that education for girls would lead to corruption and depravity of their Islamic values and morals

(Al Munajjed, 1997). Conservative families who were convinced by these claims banned their daughters from attending schools and getting an education (Al Munajjed, 1997). King Faisal bin Abdul-Aziz, however, tried to convince religious conservatives that educating girls is not against Islamic beliefs and values and both the Quran and prophet Mohammed encouraged all Muslims, including men and women, to seek an education (Al Munajjed, 1997). King Faisal also stated by educating girls, they would learn to read the Holy Quran and teach it to their future kids. He also asserted all school curricula and materials will emphasize Islamic beliefs and values (Al Munajjed, 1997). In 1961, conservative families were finally convinced by King Faisal's clarification and started to send their daughters to schools, which was considered a great progress in the history of female education in Saudi Arabia (Al Munajjed, 1997). Alarifi (2004) stated although females were allowed to attend schools 10 years after males, there were more females graduating from schools than males by 1990. Since Saudi females were allowed to go to schools, these females showed a better academic performance compared to males (Alarifi, 2004).

With the high percentage of illiteracy (90%) in Saudi Arabia in 1949, the goal of education was to reduce that percentage (Al-Abdulkareem, 2012). The main goal was also to protect Islamic heritage and emphasize its beliefs and values (Al-Abdulkareem, 2012). Alarifi (2004) indicated the Saudi Arabian society is greatly shaped and influenced by the fundamentals of Islam, which can be clearly seen in the Saudi political, social, economic, and educational rules. Al-Abdulkareem (2012) also believed the education system in Saudi Arabia was highly affected by the Islamic rules and beliefs. Denman, and Hilal (2011) stated the Saudi educational curriculum was built around the Islamic studies including the Holy Quran, Hadith (prophet Mohammed sayings and deeds), and Sharia (Islamic rules). Al Salloom (1991) also indicated Islam is the main core of the Saudi educational curriculum. From a different point of view, Taleb

(2010) argued what constitutes the Saudi Arabian society is the cultural traditions more than the Islamic beliefs. The author also believed conservatives' reaction to female education in Saudi Arabia was driven by their Saudi traditions, rather than Islamic rules. Unlike other Islamic countries, Saudi schools and universities remain gender-segregated because of the Saudi cultural traditions, not because of Islam (Taleb, 2010). In Saudi Arabia, from elementary through higher education, males and females are educated in separate buildings and campuses where all students, faculty, and staff are either completely male or female. The only mixed or coed university in Saudi Arabia is the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, which was established in 2009 and attracted professors and students from all over the world (Denman & Hilal, 2011).

Due to the increasing number of female high school graduates who wished to continue their higher education, several female universities were established across the country (Alamri, 2011; Al Munajjed, 1997). According to Baki (2004), the number of females graduating college increased from 13 in 1970 to 21,721 in 1999. According the Ministry of Higher Education (2017), there are 25 government universities, 10 private universities, and 37 private colleges across Saudi Arabia. Alarifi (2004) believed Saudi women have shown great progress and success in the past decade and are becoming more powerful in different education and job fields both inside and outside Saudi Arabia. A great example of Saudi women's success is Princess Nourah Bint AbdulRahman University, the third largest construction project in Saudi Arabia, with more than 40,000 female students enrolled in the university (Mills, 2009). Princess Nourah Bint AbdulRahman University is the first female university in Saudi Arabia run by Saudi females with a female president and a female vice president (Mills, 2009). Since King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz became the King of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has increased

empowerment of Saudi women's roles, as they, for the first time, were given their rights to vote and join the Shoura Council as active members (Al Remailh, 2016; Arafah, 2017). They were also given the opportunity to hold leadership positions in the country in different fields, including education, politics, and business. King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz was a great supporter of women's rights, as he once stated:

A Saudi woman is a first-class citizen [who]...has rights...duties...and responsibility...when we talk about the comprehensive developments which our country is experiencing in all aspects...we cannot ignore the role of Saudi woman...and her participation in the responsibility of this development (Desphande, 2001, p. 198).

Walking in the footsteps of King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz, King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz and the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman are now leading the country towards a great economic and social change under a plan called "Vision 2030". Some of the main goals of this plan will be to boost the country's economy, develop the educational curriculum, and empower the role of women and increase their participation in the workforce (BBC NEWS, 2017). In September of 2017, and under the Vision 2030, Saudi women gained their rights to drive, after years of protests and claims. Saudi Arabia is now witnessing a great revolution and empowerment of the role of Saudi women in various fields than ever before, after being known as the world's most conservative country.

Saudi Female Students in the United States

There is a lack of research addressing Saudi female international students. While there are a large number of studies on international students from different backgrounds in the United States, such as their experiences, challenges, culture shock, and adjustment process (Brown & Holloway, 2008; David, Okazaki & Saw, 2009; Junzi, 2009; Misra & Castillo, 2004; Sovic,

2007), only a few studies focused on Saudi female international students in particular. This section will review the history of Saudi international students in the United States in general and try to pay specific attention to Saudi female students.

Besides the education opportunities offered for Saudi students inside Saudi Arabia, they were also encouraged to pursue their higher education outside the country to gain knowledge and skills and to contribute to the development of their country (Alamri, 2011). Since 1970, the Saudi government started to send Saudi students to pursue their education in Western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Al Asfour & Khan, 2014).

According to Open Doors (2017), an annual statistical analysis of international students in the United States published by the Institute of International Education (IIE), the United States is one of the top destinations for international students from more than 200 countries around the world.

Saudi Arabia is among the top 10 leading countries sending their students to the United States.

In the academic year of 2016-17, Saudi Arabia ranked fourth, after China, India, and South Korea, with a number of 52,611 students, and first among Middle Eastern countries as shown in

Table 1 below.

Table 1

Top 10 Places of Origin of International Students in the United States (Open Doors, 2017).

Rank	Place of Origin	Number of Students 2016-17
1	China	350,755
2	India	186,267
3	South Korea	58,663
4	Saudi Arabia	52,611
5	Canada	27,065
6	Vietnam	22,438
7	Taiwan	21,516
8	Japan	18,780
9	Mexico	16,835
10	Brazil	13,089

Since the Saudi government started to send Saudi students abroad in 1970, the number of Saudi students studying in the United States has increased consistently. According to Open Doors (2017), the number of Saudi international students in the United States increased from 4,571 in the academic year of 1997-98 to 5,579 in the academic year of 2001-02, as illustrated in Table 2. After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, this number sharply decreased, dropping to 3,035 in the academic year of 2004-05 (Naffee, 2014). Based on an agreement between King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz and the former United States president George W. Bush, later in 2005, the King Abdullah Scholarship Program was initiated (Ministry of Higher Education, 2015). As a result, the number of international students arriving from Saudi Arabia to the United States increased to 7,886 in the academic year of 2006-07 and showed continued growth through the following years, until it reached 52,611 Saudi international students in the United States in the academic year of 2016-17 as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Number of Saudi Students in the United States from 1997/98 – 2016/17 (Open Doors, 2017).

Year	Number of Saudi students	The % of change from previous year
2016/17	52,611	-14.2%
2015/16	61,287	2.2%
2014/15	59,945	11.2%
2013/14	53,919	21.0%
2012/13	44,566	30.5%
2011/12	34,139	50.4%
2010/11	22,704	43.6%
2009/10	15,810	24.9%
2008/09	12,661	28.2%
2007/08	9,873	25.2%
2006/07	7,886	128.7%
2005/06	3,448	13.6%
2004/05	3,035	-13.8%
2003/04	3,521	-15.7%
2002/03	4,175	-25.2%
2001/02	5,579	5.8%
2000/01	5,273	2.3%

Table 2 Continued

Year	Number of Saudi students	The % of change from previous year
1999/2000	5,156	4.6%
1998/99	4,931	7.9%
1997/98	4,571	-

The launching of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program in 2005 was considered a major turning point in Saudi educational history, as it offered Saudi students a variety of opportunities to pursue their bachelor’s, master’s, and doctorate degrees in the best universities around the world (Ministry of Higher Education, 2015). After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, one of the main goals of the King Abdullah Scholarship program was to develop cross-cultural awareness and understanding and bridge the gap between Eastern and Western countries (SACM, 2015). The program also aimed to provide Saudi students with free education opportunities to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to become competent future leaders and contribute to the development of their country (SACM, 2015). The King Abdullah Scholarship program sends Saudi students to different countries around the world, including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Austria, Hungary, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, China, Malaysia, India, South Africa, and other Arab countries (Ministry of Higher Education, 2015). Although the program offers scholarships to a variety of countries around the world, most Saudi students prefer English-speaking countries, with the United States being their first option (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). According to the Ministry of Higher Education (2012), the United States is the first option for Saudi students, with a number of 149,742 students (Figure 1). Arab countries are the second option, with a number of 16,364 students (Figure 1), as some Saudi students prefer Arab countries that share the same language and a similar lifestyle (Ministry of

Higher Education, 2012). The United Kingdom is the third place after Arab countries, with a number of 14,459 students, followed by Canada and Australia (Figure 1).

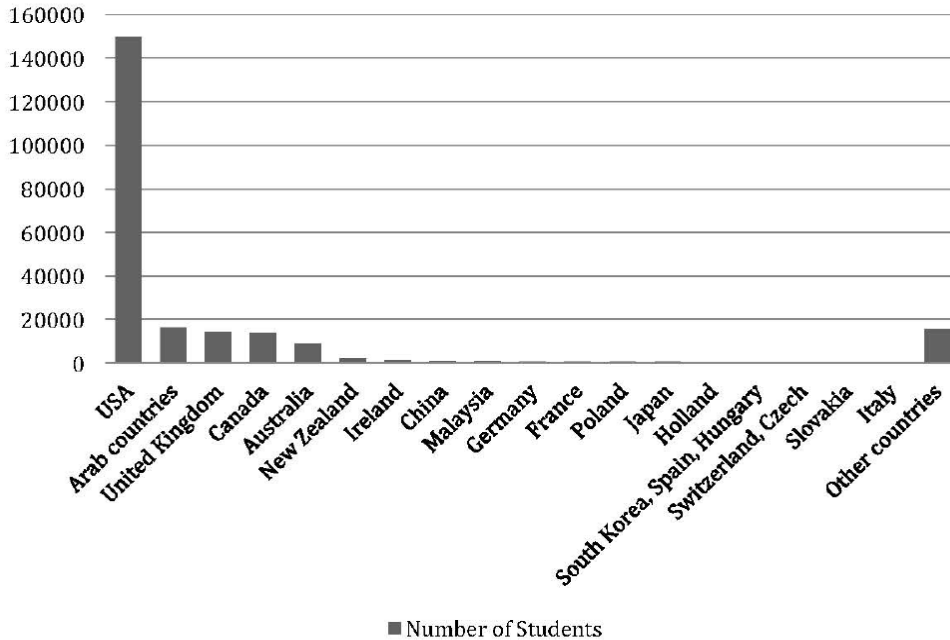


Figure 1. Number of Saudi Students Studying Abroad Based on Countries (Ministry of Higher Education, Saudi Arabia, 2012).

Previous Research on Saudi Female Students in the United States

Before 2005, the number of Saudi female international students in the United States was relatively low (SACM, 2015). After the launching of the King Abdullah Scholarship program in 2005, however, the number of Saudi female students in the United States consistently increased (SACM, 2015). Because of the negative stereotypes and the misunderstanding of the Saudi culture and Islam, the Saudi government started to send Saudi male and female students to Western countries to represent the real image of the Saudi society and clear the misconceptions surrounding Saudi women’s rights (Alamri, 2011). According to Open Doors (2015), the number of female international students coming from Saudi Arabia to the United States increased significantly during the last 8 years.

Despite the growing number of Saudi female international students in the United States, there is a lack of research addressing this increasing population, their challenges, their needs, and their unique experiences. There is a need for additional research investigating the experiences of Saudi female international students in the United States. Exploring and understanding the challenges faced by Saudi female international students in the United States would help improve their cultural adjustment as well as their academic success and overall experiences.

Reviewing previous research on Saudi female students in the United States, there were only a few doctoral dissertations that addressed Saudi female students in the United States. Exploring the acculturation challenges facing Saudi female students in the United States, Hakami (2012) found that financial issues were the most difficult challenges followed by language barrier and educational difficulties. Similarly, Macias (2016) stated that language barrier and adjusting to different educational system were some of the challenges faced by Saudi women in the United States, and that religion and family played an important role in their experiences. Language barrier, different teaching style, and lack of academic support were also some of the academic challenges mentioned by Al Remailh (2016). Davis (2014) also indicated that English proficiency was the biggest challenge facing Saudi women international students during their cultural adjustment experiences in the United States. Discussing social and cultural acculturation challenges, Davis (2014) indicated that engaging in social relationships and the ability to successfully navigate the cultural differences were some of the adjustment difficulties encountered by Saudi women. Al Remailh (2016) also pointed out that Saudi women faced some difficulties making friends and engaging in the American society. Despite the acculturation challenges facing Saudi female students, Davis (2014) pointed out that the participants in her study reported increased confidence, independence, intellectual growth, and acceptance of

others. Similarly, investigating the perceptions of Saudi women on their experiences in the United States, the participants in Macias's (2016) study also reported positive experiences such as increased self-confidence and their desire to change some of the aspects in their society in Saudi Arabia. In the same vein, Arafah (2017) stated that Saudi female students expressed positive feelings toward their transitional experience in the United States and that they were excited to go back to their country and create a positive change. Focusing on the methodology of these studies, it should be noted that four of them were purely qualitative based on interviews that focused on a limited population (Al Remainh, 2016; Arafah, 2017; Davis, 2014; Macias, 2016). Hakami's (2012) dissertation, on the other hand, was the only quantitative study implementing a survey to explore the challenges faced by Saudi female students in the United States. Unlike previous studies, the present study aims to adopt a mixed-method research implementing (a) a survey to best understand the experiences of Saudi female international students studying in different parts of the United States and from different backgrounds in Saudi Arabia and whether the challenges they face are influenced by which region they come from in Saudi Arabia and which part of the United States they live and study in and (b) semi-structured interviews to explore more detailed views and responses regarding the acculturation challenges they encounter in the United States. What the present study adds to the previous studies is that it is conducted after the historical changes that Saudi Arabia experienced during the last 2 years in general, and in women's role in particular. In April of 2016, the crown prince Mohammed bin Salman created a vision called 2030. Some of the main goals of this plan are to boost the country's economy, develop the educational curriculum, and empower the role of women and increase their participation in the workforce. One of the objectives of the present study is to

investigate whether these changes have an influence on the experiences of Saudi female international students in the United States and the way they perceive themselves.

Acculturation Challenges Encountered by International Students

Studying in another culture, international students face acculturation challenges influencing their social adjustment, academic success, and overall experiences. In his description of the term acculturation, Brown (1980) defined acculturation as “the process of becoming adapted to a new culture” (p. 128). Berry (1990) described acculturation as the adaptation and adjustment process an individual goes through when dealing with another culture. Brown’s and Berry’s definitions of acculturation, however, did not discuss the types of adaptation involved in the acculturation process. In his discussion of the acculturation process, Linton (1963), on the other hand, stated the acculturation process involves the modification and adaptation of attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors. In a more recent definition, Brown (2014) defined acculturation as “the process of adjusting and adapting to a new culture, usually when one is living in the new culture, and often with the resultant creation of a new cultural identity” (p. 366).

The acculturation challenges faced by international students can be categorized into (a) *Sociocultural Challenges*, such as social adjustment, different cultural traditions, making friends, engaging in the community, and balancing responsibilities; (b) *Language and Academic Challenges*, such as language barrier, different educational system, different teaching and learning styles, and academic support and (c) *Psychological Challenges*, such as culture shock, homesickness, stress, loneliness, and low self-esteem. This section will discuss these three main challenges faced by international students in general, and Saudi female international students in particular.

Sociocultural Challenges

Since international students come from different cultural backgrounds, they differ greatly in the way they are influenced by the new culture (Valdes, 1986). The acculturation process of international students is highly influenced by the degrees of differences and similarities between their home culture and the new culture (Valdes, 1986). According to Berry (1980), the home culture plays a significant role in the acculturation and adjustment process of international students. Berry explained the acculturation process based on a factor called *cultural maintenance*, which refers to the extent to which a person is willing to maintain his/her original cultural beliefs, values, and traditions. In an explanation of the four levels of Berry's model of acculturation, Erwin, Asai, Durham, Halvorson, and Holte (2006) stated Berry's acculturation model includes the following:

(a) integrated individuals, wherein individuals want to maintain their identity with the home culture, but also want to take on some characteristics of the new culture, (b) assimilated individuals, wherein individuals do not want to keep their identity from their home culture but would rather take on all of the characteristics of the new culture, (c) separated individuals, wherein individuals want to separate themselves from the dominant culture. Also, this level can be termed, segregation, if it is forced separation, and (d) marginalized individuals. In this level, individuals do not want to have anything to do with either the new culture or the old culture (p.13).

Berry's (1980) acculturation model includes two main principles, *cultural maintenance* and *cultural participation*. While *cultural maintenance* refers to the extent to which a person is willing to maintain his/her original cultural identity, *cultural participation* refers to the extent to which a person is willing to communicate with people outside of his/her cultural group and

participate in the larger community (Erwin et al., 2006). According to Erwin et al. (2006), both *cultural maintenance* and *cultural participation* help international students in the process of their acculturation in different ways.

In the process of acculturation and adaptation, international students face numerous challenges and difficulties. Researchers investigated the challenges encountered by international students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and their results revealed similar and different challenges encountered by those different groups. Researching international students coming to the United States from Asian cultures, Carr, Koyama, and Thiagarajan (2003) indicated the gap between the United States and the Asian cultures leads to several acculturation challenges and difficulties. Discussing the acculturation challenges faced by Chinese women migrants, Berry (1980) mentioned a number of difficulties, including language, identity, personality, cultural beliefs, attitudes, and practices. In addition to the acculturation challenges facing those Chinese migrants, Yuen (2008) explained they also face discrimination from people of the dominant culture and other ethnic groups. Similar to Asian women, African women face numerous acculturation and adjustment problems because of the great influence of their original cultural maintenance while transitioning to the new culture (Maundeni, 2001). As a result of the African women's strong attachment to their home culture, they tend to be isolated from the mainstream community.

Investigating the adaptation process of Arab Middle Eastern international students, Valdes (1986) stated, "Almost all who deal with foreign students in the U.S. agree Middle Eastern students are among the most adaptable as they can become fully 'Americanized' within a short time" (p. 94). Valdes' communication with Middle Eastern students was limited to Lebanese and Iraqi students, and therefore, his statement cannot be generalized to other Middle

Eastern cultures (Hakami, 2012). Cultures of Arab Gulf countries, such as Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, are completely different from cultures of North Middle East countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. Although they are all considered Middle Eastern countries, they differ greatly in their cultural traditions, beliefs, and practices. This is especially true when we discuss the culture of Saudi Arabia as it is known as the world's most conservative country. Although some of the challenges encountered by Saudi female international students might be similar to other international students, the types of specific challenges Saudi females have may be significant to their culture versus other cultures. For instance, all international students may need to acquire new traditions as they live and study in the United States. For Saudi female students, however, changing might be difficult as Saudi Arabia is known for its strict cultural traditions that are old and deeply rooted in its society. So, for someone who comes from a very different culture, it might be difficult to adapt to the new culture, especially when the home cultural traditions are solid and fixed for years.

Due to the restrictions on women's role in Saudi Arabia, Saudi female international students in the United States face numerous challenges and difficulties adapting to the American culture. According to Al Remainh (2016), in Saudi Arabia women are expected to respect and follow traditions and never violate them. These traditions limit the Saudi women's social role and deprive them of their rights. Women in Saudi Arabia became completely dependent on men for almost everything. Before September 2017, they were not allowed to drive a car. They also need permission from their male guardian to get an education, medical services, or travel outside the country. In 2002, Saudi female citizens were finally allowed to have their own identity cards, as they were listed as dependents on their male guardians' cards in the past (Arafah, 2017). According to Taleb (2010), it is socially unaccepted for Saudi women to live alone in separate

houses without their family or male guardians, even if they have jobs and are financially independent. In Saudi Arabia, it is considered inappropriate for a Saudi woman to live alone, and she and her family would lose their reputation if they decided to do so. Interviewing Saudi women, Al-Khateeb (1998) concluded being completely dependent on men, Saudi women feel they would not survive without men. The author also stated most Saudi women emphasized the importance of marriage as their main priority. Discussing the importance of education, jobs, and family, most Saudi women indicate that their husbands and families come first (Al-Khateeb, 1998). Being completely dependent on men in almost everything, Saudi female international students face several challenges adapting to their new roles in the United States as they are given more freedom and independency as never experienced in their home country before. Coming to the United States, LeBaron and Hausheer (2013) stated Saudi female students had to learn to navigate the new way of life here, take care of themselves, and be more responsible and independent.

Getting involved with the American culture and society and making friends are considered essential in the acculturation process of international students. For Saudi students, however, LeBaron and Hausheer (2013) indicated they tend to isolate themselves as they usually prefer to live alone or with other Saudi students. Living in their own bubble and within their small Saudi community and limiting their communication and social experiences, Saudi students face difficulties mingling with the American society. For Saudi female students in the United States, it is even more challenging to get involved in the American society and make friends, because of the stereotypes surrounding Saudi women. Because of hijab, some Americans may stare at Saudi female students in a way that may hinder and discourage them from interacting and developing relationships with them. What also prevents Saudi female students from getting

involved with the American society and making friends is their multiple roles and responsibilities. Most Saudi female international students in the United States are students, wives, and mothers and, therefore, it is very challenging for them to balance between their school work, social life, and responsibilities at home as wives and mothers (Zhang, 2016). Zhang (2016) stated most Saudi female students tend to give up their social lives and focus more on their academic and home responsibilities. Saudi female students commonly spend most of their time working individually at home instead of taking advantage of conversation partners, group work, volunteer opportunities, university events, and other library services that other international students may benefit from. In addition to the sociocultural challenges facing Saudi female international students in the United States, there are several academic challenges that may influence their experiences. The following section will address and discuss those challenges.

Language and Academic Challenges

One of the most difficult academic challenges most international students encounter is the language barrier (Baek & Damarin, 2008). According to Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015), language proficiency plays a significant role in the acculturation and adjustment process of Saudi female students in the United States. The adaptation process for Saudi female students with good language proficiency is much easier than those with low English levels. LeBaron and Hausheer (2013) indicated Saudi international students face several challenges from the moment they arrive in the United States, because of their low English proficiency. According to them, some of those students never traveled outside Saudi Arabia before coming to the United States, and their English language skills are very low. For such students, it is very challenging to get involved in the American culture and society and communicate with others.

Language proficiency also has a great influence on international students' self-confidence and academic performance. Discussing the impact of language proficiency on international students' academic experiences, Baek and Damarin (2008) stated:

Discussion of linguistic deficiency and the obstacles it brings to their performances often aroused emotional outbreaks by most of the participants throughout the study. The fact that they are not able to convey their content knowledge across the language border appeared to be very frustrating for them. One of the participants, who was a doctoral candidate from Korea, once stated very strongly that she is more knowledgeable than most of her classmates and yet not being able to display it in classroom discussion was extremely frustrating and stressful. She even called the experience "painful" (p. 200).

The academic experience of the Korean female international students is not unique, as most international students with low English proficiency levels face similar challenges that may lead to low self-esteem, learning anxiety, and depression and hinder their academic progress and adjustment. Besides language proficiency, family and other life responsibilities have a strong impact on Saudi students' academic performance (Redden, 2013). For many Saudi international students, their family and social life with other Saudis come first before their academic work (Redden, 2013). Prioritizing their family and social life with other Saudis would definitely impact Saudi students' academic progress and development.

Moving from single-sex schools to mixed-gender educational environment is considered another serious challenge facing Saudi international students in general, and Saudi female students in particular (Alhazmi, 2013). For Saudi students who experienced only gender-segregated schools, transitioning to mixed-gender academic environment presents numerous educational, social, and emotional challenges and, therefore, requires special attention and

preparation (Alhazmi, 2013). Although such a transitioning step is challenging for both genders, it is even more difficult for Saudi female students because of the Saudi traditions and the restrictions placed on women's roles in the Saudi culture and society. Interviewing Saudi female international students in Australia, Alhazmi (2013) stated that adjusting to a mixed-gender educational environment was difficult for Saudi female students in the beginning. As those female students did not know how to interact with males, they preferred to avoid them. Most of the participants in Alhazmi's (2013) study indicated they needed time to adjust to the new environment.

Another academic challenge facing international students in general, and Saudi female students in particular, is the different teaching and learning styles and the different expectations about teachers' and students' roles in the classroom and the level of students' engagement and participation (Carroll & Ryan, 2005). Coming from different educational backgrounds, international students face major problems coping with the new educational system that is completely different from the one they used to in their home country (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1998). What is mostly followed in the Asian and Middle Eastern countries is the teacher-centered approach where students used to adopt a passive role in the classroom by only listening and taking notes (Wong, 2004). Such teaching and learning style relies heavily on textbooks and tests. In the American educational system, on the other hand, students are expected to be active learners who take responsibility of their own learning, participate in classroom discussions, ask questions, prepare presentations, practice critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and express thoughts and ideas (Durkin, 2011). For international students who are used to the traditional learning environment, it is very challenging to adapt to the American educational system. Besides the academic challenges facing international students in general, and Saudi

female students in particular, highlighted above, there are a number of emotional and psychological challenges that may have a direct influence on those students' experiences in the United States. The following section will highlight and discuss those challenges.

Psychological Challenges

In addition to the social and academic difficulties, international students face several emotional and psychological challenges, including culture shock, homesickness, stress, loneliness, and low self-esteem (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). Although international students may differ in the level and the amount of time experiencing culture shock and homesick, almost all international students living and studying abroad experience these emotional and psychological challenges. While some students are able to adjust to the new culture and environment in a relatively short time, it may take more time and effort from other students.

Researchers identify a number of factors affecting the acculturation process of international students. Some researchers believed social and academic support is one of the major factors affecting international students' experiences (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002). As international students are away from their family and friends, they usually lack the type of support they need and used to get in their home country. As a result, those students ended up isolated, lonely, and depressed (Chen, 1999). Another factor affecting international students' acculturation experiences is homesickness. Fisher and Hood (1987) stated students who experience homesickness find it more challenging to adapt to the new environment. Tognoli (2003) indicated homesickness negatively impacts international students' acculturation process and is highly dependent on the distance between the students and their families.

Other researchers believed age and gender play significant roles in the acculturation process of international students (Kazantzis & Flett, 1998; Stroebe, Vliet, Hewstone, & Willis, 2002). According to Kazantzis and Flett (1998), younger international students tend to suffer more from homesickness than older students. Emphasizing gender role in international students' acculturation process, Stroebe et al. (2002) stated female students usually struggle more with homesickness compared to male students. Another factor influencing the adaptation process of international students is the extent to which the students' home culture is similar or different from the new culture (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Pedersen, 1995; Ward, Buchner, & Furnham, 2008). The more the student's culture is different from the new culture, the more difficult is the adjustment and adaptation process.

Based on the factors influencing the acculturation process of international students discussed above, Saudi female international students seem to face numerous challenges adapting to the American culture. Coming from a collectivist culture that emphasizes the importance of family and social relationships, it is a real challenge for Saudi female students to be away from their family and friends. The huge differences between the Saudi traditions and culture and the American culture also present several adjustment difficulties for Saudi female international students in the United States. Being a Saudi female international student in the United States might be quite frustrating due to the stereotypes surrounding them. Because of the stereotypes surrounding Saudi women in the United States, they are more likely to experience prejudice and discrimination which may negatively impact their social and academic experiences. Although most international students face several acculturation challenges while living and studying abroad, it can be clearly seen that the case of Saudi international students in the United States requires special attention. This review of literature addressed the acculturation challenges facing

international students in general, and Saudi female students in particular. The literature review also provided an overview of the history of female education in Saudi Arabia and the Saudi female international students in the United States.

Summary of the Literature Review

Based on the previous literature review, there are a number of conclusions that can be drawn. First, female education in Saudi Arabia has gone through several stages and developments from the time it started until now, and has been strongly affected by its advocates and opponents. Second, Saudi female international students in the United States are different from other international students due to the huge differences between the American and the Saudi cultures in general, and in women's role in these cultures in particular. Third, despite the growing number of Saudi female international students in the United States, there is a lack of research addressing this increasing population, their challenges, their needs, and their unique experiences. Fourth, reviewing previous research on Saudi female students in the United States, there were only a few doctoral dissertations that addressed Saudi female students in the United States. While four of these dissertations were purely qualitative studies based on interviews which focused on a limited population (Al Remailh, 2016; Arafeh, 2017; Davis, 2014; Macias, 2016), only one dissertation adopted a quantitative research design investigating a larger population (Hakami, 2012). Finally, there is a need for a mixed methods research collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. Implementing a survey would help explore whether Saudi female students' backgrounds have any influence on their experiences in the United States by collecting data from a variety of Saudi female students who come from different regions in Saudi Arabia, live and study in different states in the United States, present different age groups, have different length of residence in the United States, have different experiences being in other countries, present different educational levels, and present different

marital status. The interviews, on the other hand, would help investigate in depth participants' responses and views regarding their acculturation challenges with more details. While previous studies focused only on the challenges faced by Saudi female students in the United States, the interviews in the present study aim to explore their challenges as well as their strategies to cope with these challenges. What the present study would also add to the previous studies is that it is conducted after the historical changes that Saudi Arabia experienced during the last 2 years including the empowerment of Saudi women's role in the country. That would help investigate whether these changes and development have any impact on Saudi female students' experiences in the United States and how they perceive themselves.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will be used to discuss the methodology and research design for this study by providing the research questions, with particular emphasis on the reasons of selecting the data collection methods and the strengths of the design. Chapter 3 will also describe the sampling and the characteristics of the participants of the study and summarize the demographic variables. It will then describe in detail the instruments that were used to collect the data, offer justifications for use, present reliability statistics, and discuss the validity and appropriateness of the instruments. Chapter 3 will end with a discussion regarding the data collection procedures and with an explanation of the data analysis process for both the quantitative and qualitative data.

Research Questions

The present study sought to answer four main research questions divided into two phases: quantitative and qualitative. The first research question aimed to investigate the acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States. This research question was explored both quantitatively and qualitatively.

1. What are the sociocultural, academic, and psychological acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female international students in the United States?

The second research question presented the quantitative phase of the study and aimed to explore whether Saudi female students backgrounds affect the challenges they encountered. This research question was addressed quantitatively via an online survey:

2. Do the Saudi female students' backgrounds and demographic variables have any effect on the acculturation challenges they face?

The next two research questions were in the qualitative phase of the study and aimed to investigate in depth how Saudi female students cope with their acculturation challenges, and whether the historical changes the country of Saudi Arabia experienced during the last 2 years have any influence on their experiences. These two research questions were approached qualitatively through semi-structured interviews:

3. How do Saudi female international students cope with their acculturation challenges?
4. Do the historical changes the country of Saudi Arabia experienced during the last 2 years in the women's role have any influence on Saudi female students' experiences in the United States and how they perceive themselves?

Design of the Study

As the present study aimed to explore the acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States and their ways of adaptation, a mixed methods research combining quantitative and qualitative data was implemented: (a) a survey to collect the quantitative data and explore the sociocultural, academic, and psychological acculturation challenges faced by Saudi female international students in the United States, and (b) semi-structured interviews to gather the qualitative data and explore in depth participants' perceptions regarding their experiences in the United States, report detailed views and responses, uncover the meanings participants assign to their experiences, and provide a holistic description and explanation of the data (Heigham & Croker, 2009; Mackey & Gass, 2015). The Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods was utilized as the quantitative data was gathered and analyzed followed by qualitative data collection and analysis (Figure 2).

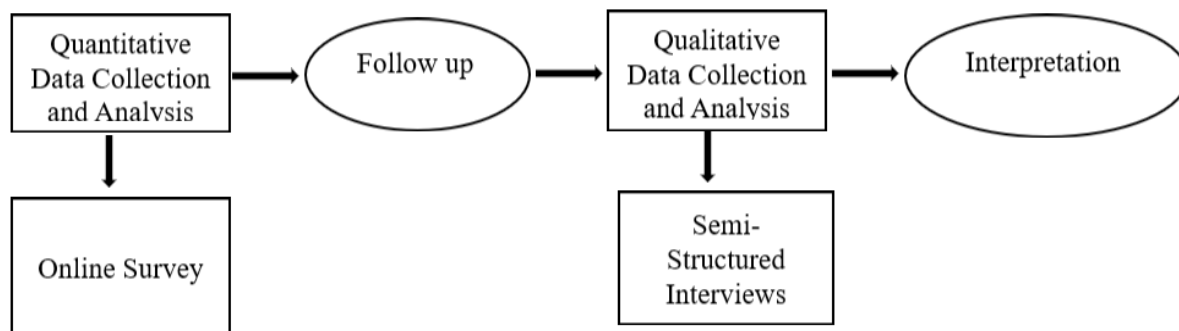


Figure 2. Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design (Adapted from Creswell, 2014).

Collecting and analyzing the qualitative data as a second step helped explain the quantitative data in more detail (Creswell, 2014). Conducting surveys and multiple interviews helped realize whether participants' different backgrounds, which region they come from in Saudi Arabia, and which part of the United States they live and study in have any influence on their perceptions and experiences. The online survey and multiple interviews also helped understand whether the participants' experiences are similar or different and draw a better and clear conclusion based on these comparisons (Mackey & Gass, 2015).

Participants

The aim of this study was to explore the unique experiences of Saudi female international students in the United States and investigate the sociocultural, academic, and psychological acculturation challenges that they encounter and how they cope with such challenges. The main objective was to explore whether participants' different backgrounds, which region they come from in Saudi Arabia and which part of the United States they live and study in have any influence on their perceptions and experiences. To achieve this goal, an online survey and semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The participants of this study included 100 Saudi female international students who presented different age groups, came from different regions in Saudi Arabia, lived and studied in different

parts of the United States, had different length of residence in the United States, had different experiences being in other countries, presented different educational levels, and presented different marital status. Six of the participants were asked to volunteer for a follow-up interview to investigate in depth their perceptions regarding their experiences in the United States and gain detailed views and responses about the acculturation challenges they face and their strategies to cope with these challenges. Table 3 summarizes the descriptive information of the participants' demographic variables.

Table 3

Descriptive Information of Participants' Demographic Variables

Participants' demographics		Frequency
Age	18 - 22 years old	13
	23 - 29 years old	53
	30 - 39 years old	31
	40 - 49 years old	2
	50+ years old	1
Region in Saudi Arabia	Central region	22
	Eastern region	23
	Northern region	2
	Southern region	14
	Western region	39
State	Alabama	14
	California	9
	Colorado	1
	Connecticut	1
	Florida	5
	Georgia	2
	Illinois	3
	Kansas	2
	Kentucky	2
	Maryland	1
	Michigan	1
	Minnesota	1
	New Jersey	1
	New York	2

Table 3 Continued

Participants' demographics		Frequency
	North Carolina	1
	North Dakota	1
	Ohio	5
	Oregon	1
	Pennsylvania	23
	Tennessee	18
	Texas	4
	Vermont	1
	Washington	1
I live in:	Big city	45
	Small town	55
Length of residence in the US	Less than 1 year	12
	1-2 years	25
	3-5 years	45
	More than 5 years	18
Been in other countries	Yes	65
	No	35
Length of residence in other countries	Less than 6 months	55
	6 months - 1 year	5
	2 - 3 years	4
	More than 3 years	1
Level of education	English Language Program	22
	Bachelor's degree	28
	Master's degree	36
	PhD degree	13
	MD / post-doctoral fellowship	1
Financial sponsor	SACM-Sponsored	93
	Self-Sponsored	7
English skills self-rating	Poor	3
	OK	9
	Good	38
	Very good	29
	Excellent	21

Table 3 Continued

Participants' demographics		Frequency
Marital status	Divorced	2
	Married	69
	Single	29
Have children	No	41
	Yes	59
Total		100

The participants in this study were 100 Saudi female students who lived and studied in the United States. The participants' ages ranged from 18-50+ years old, and were grouped into five main age groups; (a) group 1 included ages ranged from 18-22 with a frequency of 13 (13%), (b) group 2 included ages ranged from 23-29 with a frequency of 53 (53%), (c) group 3 included ages ranged from 30-39 with a frequency of 31 (31%), (d) group 4 included ages ranged from 40-49 with a frequency of 2 (2%), and (e) group 5 included ages 50 years old and more with a frequency of 1 (1%). The largest group of participants was group 2 and included ages from 23-29 with a frequency of 53, followed by group 3 that included ages from 30-39 with a frequency of 31. The smallest number of participants, on the other hand, was from group 5 and included ages 50+ years old with a frequency of 1, followed by group 4 which included ages from 40-49 with a frequency of 2.

For the regions of Saudi Arabia, the participants came from five main regions; (a) participants who came from the Central region with a frequency of 22 (22%), (b) participants who came from the Eastern region with a frequency of 23 (23%), (c) participants who came from the Northern region with a frequency of 2 (2%), (d) participants who came from the Southern region with a frequency of 14 (14%), and (e) participants who came from the Western region with a frequency of 39 (39%). While the largest number of students came from the Western

region of Saudi Arabia with a frequency of 39, the smallest number of students came from the Northern region with a frequency of 2.

Coming from different parts of the United States, the participants lived and studied in 23 different states of the United States. The largest number of students was from the state of Pennsylvania with a frequency of 23 (23%). The states with the smallest number of students (e.g. only 1 student in each state) were Colorado, Connecticut, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington. The 23 states were grouped into 4 regions based on the United States Census Bureau; Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. There were 28 (28%) participants from the Northeast region, 13 (13%) participants from the Midwest region, 47 (47%) participants from the South region, and 12 (12%) participants from the West region. While 45 participants lived in big cities, 55 students lived in small towns.

For the length of residence in the United States, the years of living and studying in the United States were grouped into 4 periods, (a) participants who lived in the US for less than one year with a frequency of 12 (12%), (b) participants who lived in the US for 1-2 years with a frequency of 25 (25%), (c) participants who lived in the US for 3-5 years with a frequency of 45 (45%), and (d) participants who lived in the US for more than 5 years with a frequency of 18 (18%). While 65 participants indicated they traveled to other countries before coming to the United States, 35 participants said they had not. For those who traveled to other countries, their length of residence in other countries were grouped into 4 periods; (a) participants who lived in other countries for less than 6 months with a frequency of 55 (55%), (b) participants who lived in other countries for 6 months-1 year with a frequency of 5 (5%), (c) participants who lived in

other countries for 2-3 years with a frequency of 4 (4%), and (d) participants who lived in other countries for more than 3 years with a frequency of 1 (1%).

Presenting different levels of education: (a) 22 (22%) students were in English language programs, (b) 28 (28%) students were in bachelor programs, (c) 36 (36%) students were in master programs, (d) 13 (13%) students were in PhD programs, and (e) 1 student was in a MD/post-doctoral program. While 93 of the participants were sponsored by the Saudi Cultural Mission (SACM-sponsored), only 7 participants were independent students who depended on self or family financial support (self-sponsored). Rating their own English language skills: (a) 3 (3%) students said their English language skills were poor, (b) 9 (9%) students said their English language skills were okay, (c) 38 (38%) students said their English language skills were good, (d) 29 (29%) students said their English language skills were very good, and (e) 21 (21%) students said their English language skills were excellent.

For their marital status: (a) 29 (29%) students reported they were single, (b) 69 (69%) students reported they were married, and (c) only 2 (2%) students reported they were divorced. While 59 (59%) of the participants said they have children, 41 (41%) students said they do not.

Instruments

As this study adopted an Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods research design, there were two main phases to collect the quantitative and qualitative data. In the first phase, an online survey was used to collect the quantitative data. To gather the qualitative data, on the other hand, semi-structured interviews were conducted as a second phase of the study. A description of the instruments used to collect the quantitative and qualitative data is provided below.

Acculturation Challenges Survey

In order to explore the sociocultural, academic, and psychological acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States, an online survey was used (Appendix A). The software system used for the online survey was Google Forms. The study and the survey were reviewed by members of the Internal Review Board (IRB) at the University of Memphis to verify the eligibility of this study. After reviewing the study and the research instrument, an IRB approval was obtained to conduct the study (Appendix C). The survey was administered online as the researcher emailed the survey to *Saudis in the USA organization* which is a well-known organization followed by many Saudi students in the United States. On their pages on social media, the organization posted an invitation to the online survey. After the survey has been filled by 100 participants, the researcher stopped accepting more responses. There were two links included in the invitation; a link to the English survey, and another link to the Arabic survey. Since the participants might be of different English proficiency levels, there was a need to include an Arabic version of the survey for those who might struggle with the English version. In the beginning of the survey, the participants were presented with a consent form and were asked to continue if they agree to participate in the study. The consent form in the Arabic survey was translated into Arabic as well.

In the online survey, there were two main sections. The first section included the relevant demographic variables such as: (a) age group, (b) regions of Saudi Arabia where students come from, (c) Which State students live and study in, (d) whether they live in a big city or small town, (e) length of residence in the United States, (f) whether they have been to another country and for how long, (g) educational level, (h) financial sponsor, (i) self-rating of English skills, (j) marital status, and (k) whether they have children or not. The second section, on the other hand,

contained a scale of challenges faced by Saudi female students in the United States. The scale was adapted from Hakami's (2012) study and modified to serve the purpose of this study. The scale was designed to explore: (a) the acculturation challenges facing Saudi female students in the United States, (b) whether students' backgrounds and demographic variables have an impact on the acculturation challenges they encounter, and (c) whether the historical changes in the country of Saudi Arabia experienced and the empowerment of women's role have any influence on how these students perceive themselves or the acculturation challenges they encounter. In the scale, there were 42 items presented in random order, and the participants were asked to choose their level of agreement with each statement (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). These 42 items presented 7 main themes; cultural challenges, social challenges, psychological challenges, educational challenges, language challenges, familial challenges, and religious challenges. Table 4 summarizes the main themes with their specific items.

Table 4

The Main Themes of the Survey

Themes		Items
Cultural Challenges	3	It is hard to interact with male students because it conflicts with my culture.
	16	My own culture conflicts with the American culture.
	24	I have to adjust my own culture and traditions to get along in the U.S.
	29	I was culturally shocked when I first came to the U.S.
	35	The new Saudi vision 2030 would positively influence my experience in the U.S.
	37	I have heard racist comments from people in the U.S.
Social Challenges	6	I have many American Friends.
	11	I seek social relationships in the U.S.
	12	I take advantage of volunteering

Table 4 Continued

Themes	Items
	opportunities.
	13 I attend and participate in cultural and social events organized by Americans.
	19 It is difficult to make friends in the U.S.
	23 I attend and participate in public meetings and private parties where most of the people are Americans.
	39 It is hard to start a conversation with people in the U.S.
Psychological Challenges	1 Being away from family and friends has a negative influence on my emotions.
	8 I feel isolated from the American community.
	9 I am home sick.
	18 I feel uncomfortable when there are male classmates.
	26 The American culture has a negative impact on my psychological health.
	36 I feel more self-confident after the recent changes in Saudi Arabia in general, and in women's role in particular.
Educational Challenges	4 Education in my country is different from education in the U.S.
	10 I need to adapt my learning strategies to succeed in the American universities.
	21 I am satisfied with the level of my academic performance.
	22 I am pleased about my decision to come to study in the U.S.
	25 I prefer to work and study individually.
	30 I like to engage and participate in study groups.
	33 It is hard to understand the U.S. educational system.
	42 Students services and academic support provided for international students meet my needs.
Language Challenges	7 Making friends with Americans depends on my English mastery.
	15 My educational success depends on my

Table 4 Continued

Themes	Items
	mastery of the English language.
	28 My English language skills prevent me from talking to people in the U.S.
	31 I would like to work in the U.S. to improve my English language.
	38 Language is the most difficult challenge in the U.S.
Familial Challenges	5 Family duties and responsibilities conflict with my academic life.
	14 It is better to be with my family when studying abroad.
	20 It is hard to study in the U.S. when you have kids.
	27 It is hard for me to be a parent in the U.S.
	32 I have more family responsibilities than I had in my country.
	34 It is hard to be a single when studying abroad.
Religious Challenges	2 I experience discrimination because of my hijab and Muslim identity.
	17 People in the U.S. avoid talking to me because of my hijab.
	40 I am afraid to practice my religion obligations such as praying or wearing hijab in the U.S.
	41 People in the U.S. are rude to me because of my hijab.

Before releasing the survey to the target audience, a pilot survey strategy was used to test the survey. Both the English and Arabic versions of the survey were emailed to colleagues and reviewers to complete it. The English version of the survey was completed by 10 people and another 10 people completed the Arabic version. Piloting the survey was helpful to ensure that the survey displays correctly for all respondents, to make sure that all questions are clear and make sense to all participants, to spot and resolve errors, to discover and address any practical

problems (e.g. time to complete the survey, accessing the survey, etc.), and to polish the survey based on respondents' comments and feedback.

To confirm the reliability of the items of this online survey, a reliability test was implemented in the SPSS software. Cronbach's alpha was .798 with 42 items for the internal consistency for the survey questions in general. For Cronbach's alpha test of reliability, .70 is considered acceptable and .80 or greater is preferred. Table 5 shows the reliability statistics of the online survey utilized in this study with a score of .798, indicating that the survey is reliable. Table 6 summarizes item statistics for the survey.

Table 5

Reliability Statistics of the Survey (N=42)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.798	.795	42

Table 6

Summary Item Statistics for the Survey

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Variance	N of Items
Item Means	2.519	1.350	3.400	2.050	.247	42
Inter-Item Correlations	.867	.391	1.262	.870	.038	42

Semi-Structured Interviews

Since the present study aimed to explore the acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States and their ways to cope with these challenges, follow-up interviews were helpful to explore in depth participants' perceptions and opinions regarding

their experiences living and studying in the United States and reported more detailed views in addition to their responses to the online survey. The researcher conducted the interviews in the participants' first language, Arabic, so they can be more comfortable talking about their experiences and the challenges they encounter. Arabic is also the researcher's first language. Conducting the interviews in the participants' first language allowed the researcher to obtain more data with more explanation and details. To ensure validity, a back-translation method was used to translate the interview questions from English to Arabic. First, the English version of the interview questions was translated to Arabic by one translator. Second, the translated Arabic version was translated to English by another translator. Then, the two English versions were compared to ensure validity. While some of interviews were conducted face-to-face, others were online via Skype based on the participants' location and preference. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated from Arabic to English.

The interview included 12 questions which were mainly designed to elicit participants' perceptions of their experiences in the United States, the acculturation challenges they encounter, and their ways of adaptation and adjustment (Appendix B). The semi-structured interviews followed an interview guide containing key questions which were general open-ended questions related to the research questions and improvised questions in case some of the participants' responses worth further investigation (Heigham & Croker, 2009). The interview sessions took about 10-15 minutes. At the beginning of the interview, the participants were given a consent form and were asked to continue if they agree to participate in the study. As the researcher is a Saudi female student in the United States, this could present issues related to the reliability and validity of the research as the researcher might affect participants' responses during the interview sessions or impose her own bias and interpretation based on her own experience. To avoid such

issues in the data collection and analysis, the researcher put her own experience aside when interviewing the participants and analyzing the data. During the interviews, she listened to the participants without interrupting them, imposing her experience, affecting their opinions, agreeing or disagreeing with them, or suggesting solutions. With the participants' permission, all the interviews were audio-recorded, and were kept securely in a digital file under the researcher google drive account and was destroyed after the study was completed. There were no records to keep after writing the results of the study. When writing about the participants, the researcher used pseudonyms instead of their real names.

Data Collection Procedures

As the present study adopted an Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods design which was a two-phase project, the quantitative data were first collected through an online survey and analyzed. Following the quantitative data collection and analysis, the qualitative data were gathered from semi-structured interviews and analyzed as a second phase (Figure 3). After obtaining the IRB approval to conduct the study, an invitation emails were sent to participants containing a link to the English survey and another link to the Arabic version of the survey. After the quantitative data collection, the data were analyzed.

Following the quantitative data collection and analysis, six of the participants agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. While three of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, the other three interviews were conducted online via Skype. At the beginning of the interview, the participants were presented with the consent form and asked to continue if they agreed to participate in the study. All six interviews were conducted in the participants' first language, Arabic, to allow the researcher to obtain more data with more explanation and details. With the

participants' permissions, all interviews were audio-recorded. After conducting each interview, the interviews were transcribed, translated from Arabic to English, and analyzed.

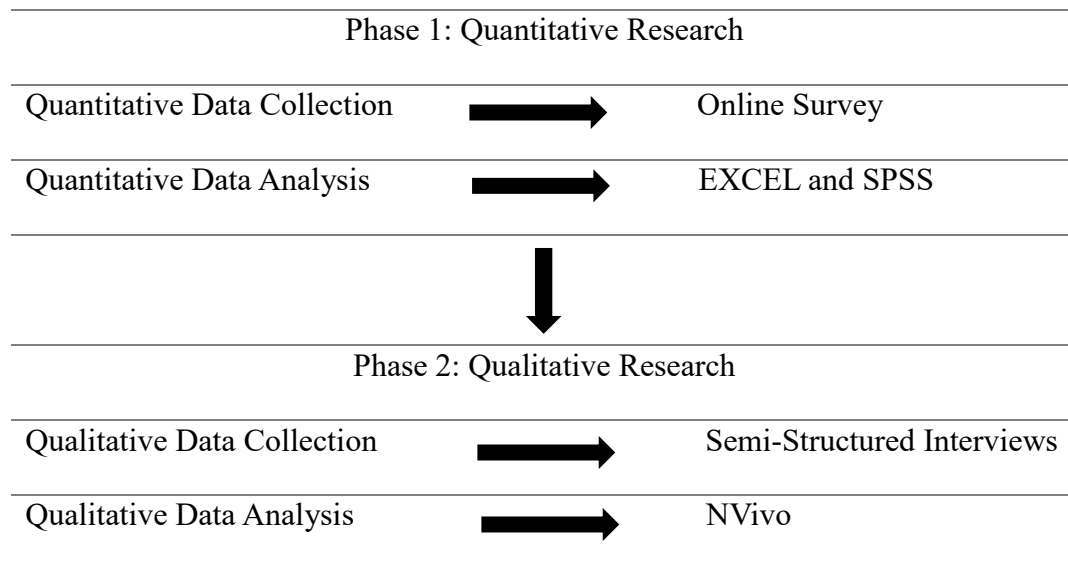


Figure 3. Study Data Collection Procedures.

Data Analysis

A mixed-methods research design was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data, while the Explanatory Sequential Mixed Method was used for data analysis. Following the quantitative data collection and analysis, the qualitative data provided further explanation with more detail (Creswell, 2014). In this type of data analysis, the qualitative database was built on the quantitative one. Below is a description of the statistical tools used for analyzing the quantitative data as well as the data analysis process for the qualitative data.

Analyzing the quantitative data gathered from the online survey, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was carried out using SPSS to group survey items based on similar underlying factors that might influence Saudi female students responses to the Likert scale items on the survey calling for information related to their acculturation challenges in the United States. Then, a descriptive analysis of acculturation challenges was carried out using EXCEL to present the frequency of items, and report the participants' levels of agreement (Strongly agree, Agree,

Disagree, Strongly disagree) with the acculturation challenges presented in the survey. The frequency of responses, mean, and standard deviation, of each theme and each item were reported. Descriptive analysis was also used to identify the greatest and least acculturation challenges facing Saudi female students in the United States. A comparison of acculturation challenges was then carried out using a Related-Samples Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks to determine whether scores on the underlying factors differed. The role of demographic variables on Saudi female students' acculturation challenges was also examined and analyzed using Kuskall-Wallis H with variables with more than two levels, and Mann Whitney U with variables with only two levels.

Analyzing the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, the interviews were first audio-recorded. Then, the interviews were transcribed and translated from Arabic to English. In the beginning of the process of analysis, the transcripts were quickly read, and notes were taken on the topics covered in the interview by writing down a list of single words (Heigham & Croker, 2009). A more careful and analytical process of coding by identifying themes, categories, and breaking down the interviews into small chunks was performed (Heigham & Croker, 2009). NVivo computer program was used to organize and analyze the data. Following a narrative style, a special attention was paid to the key themes and categories, the voices and experiences of the participants were delivered, and quotations that captured and depicted different aspects of the topics were presented.

Chapter 4: Quantitative Results and Discussion

Chapter 4 will be used to report and present the quantitative data collected from the online survey and discuss the main findings in relation to the first phase of the study while answering the first and second research questions:

1. What are the sociocultural, academic, and psychological acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female international students in the United States?
2. Do the Saudi female students' backgrounds and demographic variables have any effect on the acculturation challenges they face?

Analyzing the quantitative data included: (a) factor analysis to group the survey items based on common underlying variables, (b) the descriptive analysis for the survey's factors and items, and (c) the correlation results between the acculturation experiences of Saudi female students in the United States and their demographic variables. Chapter 4 concludes with a summary and the discussion of major findings.

Factor Analysis

As a first step, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was carried out using SPSS to group survey items based on similar underlying factors that might influence Saudi female students' responses to the Likert scale items on the survey calling for information related to their acculturation challenges in the United States. Data from all 100 participants who completed the survey were included. The survey had 42 items with 4 response options: *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, *Disagree*, and *Strongly Disagree*. These options were scored 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. Items with negative correlation were inverse marked so that a lower score reflected participants' positive acculturation experiences. These inverse marked items were (Q6, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q21, Q22, Q23, Q30, and Q36). The data were first examined to determine whether they were

suitable for a factor analysis. A correlation matrix was checked to make sure each variable was correlated at .3 with at least one more variable. The correlation r must be .30 or greater as anything lower suggests a weak relationship between variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). An examination of the correlation matrix revealed there were 5 items (Q4, Q24, Q31, Q35, and Q42) below $r > .3$, and therefore, should be removed (Table 7).

Table 7

Correlation Matrix of the Survey Items

Item	Highest correlation	with
Q4	.24	Q40
Q24	.285	Q23
Q31	-.27	Q34
Q35	.291	Q42
Q42	.291	Q35

Checking the KMO scores for individual items, .5 is normally the cut off for a KMO score (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). An examination of the individual item KMO scores showed the same items with low correlation had low KMO scores $> .5$ as presented in Table 8. The items (Q4, Q24, Q31, Q35, and Q42) with lower correlations and low KMO scores were, therefore, removed.

Table 8

Individual Item KMO Scores

Item	KMO
Q4	.366
Q24	.343
Q31	.417
Q35	.412
Q42	.398

The Bartlett's test of sphericity was at the significant level of .000 as presented in Table 9, meaning that the data were a good match for a factor analysis and had patterned relationships.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure (KMO) of Sampling Adequacy was also examined after

removing the five items with low correlations and low KMO scores, and determined that the data were suitable for the EFA with cut-off above .50 which was .690 as shown in Table 9.

Table 9

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.690
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1604.186
	df	666
	Sig.	.000

The factor analysis was set to extract any factor with an eigenvalue over one. This yielded 14 underlying factors, however, most of these factors had very low initial eigenvalues which was an indication there might be some noise in the data. After removing the five items with low correlations and low KMO scores, the analysis was carried out again and yielded an 11-factor model. Checking the percentages of the variance explained, factor one explained 18.88% of the variance, factor two explained 10.2%, factor three explained 7.6%, factor four explained 6%, and factor five explained only 4.99% as presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Total Variance Explained for Extracted Factors

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sum of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.988	18.887	18.887	6.988	18.887	18.887
2	3.776	10.204	29.091	3.776	10.204	29.091
3	2.823	7.629	36.720	2.823	7.629	36.720
4	2.239	6.052	42.771	2.239	6.052	42.771
5	1.849	4.997	47.768	1.849	4.997	47.768
6	1.552	4.194	51.963	1.552	4.194	51.963
7	1.481	4.002	55.964	1.481	4.002	55.964
8	1.357	3.667	59.631	1.357	3.667	59.631
9	1.213	3.277	62.908	1.213	3.277	62.908
10	1.116	3.016	65.924	1.116	3.016	65.924
11	1.038	2.804	68.728	1.038	2.804	68.728

Then there was a sharp decline in explanatory value. In general, factors should minimally explain 5-10% of the variance and factors all together should explain at least 60% of the variance. Reaching seven factors, it explained 56% of the variance and took till factor nine to explain the remaining 4%, and by then, each individual factor contributed a little. This led to question whether factors eight to 11 were meaningful. There was a little to distinguish factors nine to 11 from factors 12 and 13, which was another argument for not considering them meaningful factors. Checking the scree plot, it did not have a very clear inflection point as it was more of a gradual leveling for quite long ways. Six seemed to be the clearest inflection point as presented in Figure 4.

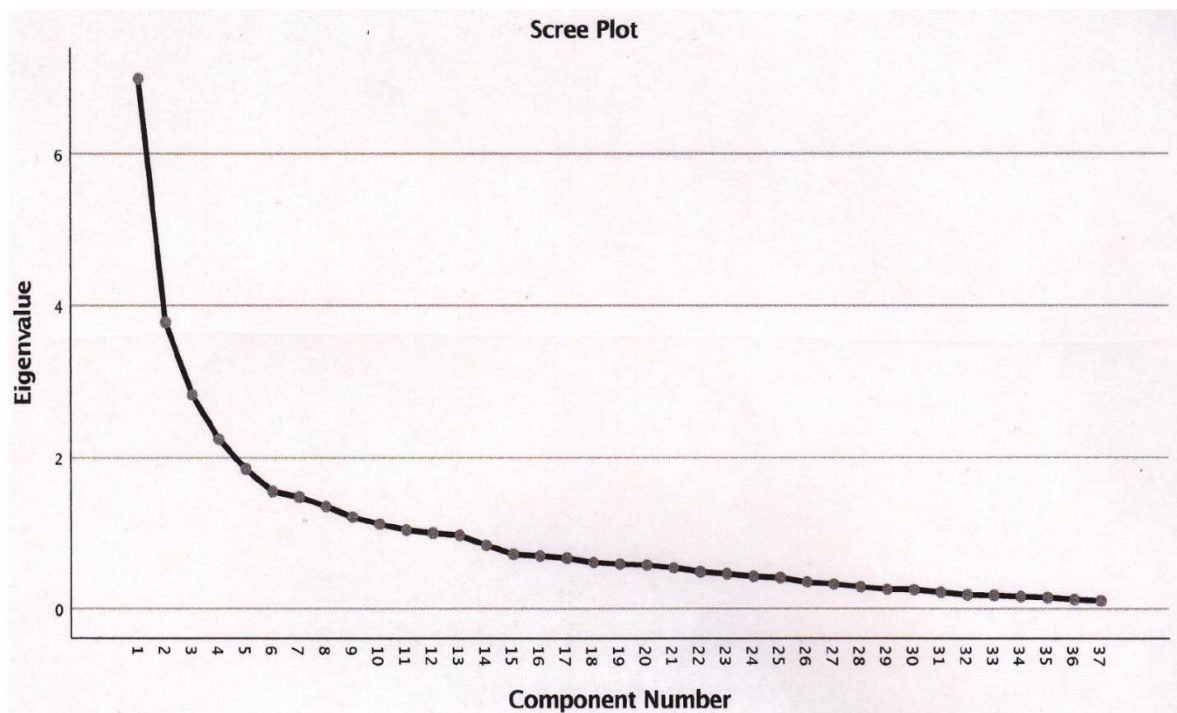


Figure 4. Scree Plot for Survey Underlying Variables.

This was a complex situation as the scree plot indicated six factors, the variance explained by each factor indicated five factors, the eigenvalue of one criterion indicated 11 factors, and the total variance explained indicated eight factors. The rotated component matrix could not load

because it could not land on a solution. Multiple forced factor analyses, therefore, were carried out trying eight, six, and five factor solutions. After these forced factor analyses, six factor solution seemed to be the cleanest. Landing on 6 factor solution, the survey items and how they were grouped based on rotated component matrix were checked and labeled as presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Variables Labels and their Key Items from the Survey

Factor number	Key item	Label
1	2 I experience discrimination because of my hijab and Muslim identity.	Discrimination challenges
	17 People in the U.S. avoid talking to me because of my hijab.	
	26 The American culture has a negative impact on my psychological health.	
	37 I have heard racist comments from people in the U.S.	
	40 I am afraid to practice my religion obligations such as praying or wearing hijab in the US	
	41 People in the U.S. are rude to me because of my hijab.	
2	7 Making friends with Americans depends on my English mastery.	Language and academic difficulties
	10 I need to adapt my learning strategies to succeed in the American universities.	
	18 I feel uncomfortable when there are male classmates.	
	*21 I am satisfied with the level of my academic performance.	
	28 My English language skills prevent me from talking to people in the U.S.	
	29 I was culturally shocked when I first came to the U.S.	

Table 11 Continued

Factor number	Key item	Label
	33 It is hard to understand the U.S. educational system.	
	38 Language is the most difficult challenge in the U.S.	
	39 It is hard to start a conversation with people in the U.S.	
3	*6 I have many American Friends.	Social challenges
	8 I feel isolated from the American community.	
	*12 I take advantage of volunteering opportunities.	
	*13 I attend and participate in cultural and social events organized by Americans.	
	*23 I attend and participate in public meetings and private parties where most of the people are Americans.	
4	3 It is hard to interact with male students because it conflicts with my culture.	Cultural challenges
	9 I am home sick.	
	15 My educational success depends on my mastery of the English language.	
	16 My own culture conflicts with the American culture.	
	32 I have more family responsibilities than I had in my country.	
	34 It is hard to be a single when studying abroad.	
5	5 Family duties and responsibilities conflict with my academic life.	Familial obligations
	14 It is better to be with my family when studying abroad.	
	19 It is difficult to make friends in the U.S.	
	20 It is hard to study in the U.S. when you have kids.	

Table 11 Continued

Factor number	Key item	Label
	25 I prefer to work and study individually.	
	27 It is hard for me to be a parent in the U.S.	
6	1 Being away from family and friends has a negative influence on my emotions.	Psychological and confidence issues
	*11 I seek social relationships in the U.S.	
	*22 I am pleased about my decision to come to study in the U.S.	
	*30 I like to engage and participate in study groups.	
	*36 I feel more self-confident after the recent changes in Saudi Arabia in general, and in women's role in particular.	

Note: Items with negative correlations are marked with ().

The first variable labeled “discrimination challenges” included items related to discrimination against Islam and Muslim women in the United States. For the second variable, language and academic difficulties, the items included presented language and educational challenges that Saudi female students may encounter in the United States such as the negative influence of poor language skills both socially and academically and the different educational system including the different teaching and learning styles. The third variable titled social challenges included items describing difficulties related to social life such as making friends and engaging in the American society. Cultural challenges were the fourth variable and included items describing difficulties related to cultural adjustment. The fifth variable labeled familial obligations included items describing difficulties of making a balance between family duties and responsibilities and academic life. Item 19, “It is difficult to make friends in the U.S.”, was listed in family obligation challenges as the participants in the interviews indicated that their

family responsibilities made it difficult for them to make friends in the United States as they spent most of their times with their family. Item 25, “I prefer to work and study individually”, was also listed in this variable for the same reason as the participants indicated they preferred to study and work individually because they needed to stay home with their children. For the sixth variable, psychological and confidence issues, the items included attitudes which expressed high or lack of confidence.

Descriptive Analysis of Acculturation Challenges

The six variables of acculturation challenges included: (a) discrimination challenges; (b) language and academic difficulties; (c) social challenges; (d) cultural challenges; (e) familial obligations; and (f) psychological and confidence issues. To answer the first research question of what are the acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States, frequencies of all items in each variable are presented below (Table 12). The purpose of this analysis was to show the levels of participants’ agreements with the six acculturation challenges and present the most difficult challenge in the United States based on their responses to the survey items.

Table 12

Frequency of the Most Difficult Challenge in the US

Acculturation Challenge	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Mean	SD
Social Challenges	24	35.8	27.4	12.8	2.29	0.97
Cultural Challenges	27.6	30	25.6	16.6	2.31	1.05
Familial Obligations	19	31	29.1	20.8	2.51	1.02
Language and Academic Difficulties	13.4	25.4	30.2	30.8	2.78	1.02
Psychological and Confidence Issues	9.2	22.2	35.4	33.2	2.92	0.95
Discrimination Challenges	4.1	21	33.5	41.3	3.12	0.88

As presented in Table 12, Saudi female participants indicated that social challenges were the most difficult acculturation challenge in the United States with a high agreement percentage of 59.8% and a mean of 2.29 ($SD = 0.97$), indicating an overall agreement with the social challenges. The second most difficult acculturation challenge, according to Saudi female students, was cultural challenges with an agreement percentage of 57.6 % and a mean of 2.31 ($SD = 1.05$), indicating an agreement with the cultural challenges. Familial obligations appeared to be the third acculturation challenge facing Saudi female students in the United States with an agreement percentage of 50% and a mean of 2.51 ($SD = 1.02$), indicating an agreement with the familial obligation challenges. The fourth acculturation challenge was language and academic difficulties with an agreement percentage of 38.8 % and a mean of 2.78 ($SD = 1.02$), indicating an agreement with language and academic difficulties. Psychological and confidence issues were the fifth acculturation challenge with an agreement percentage of 31.4 % and a mean of 2.92 ($SD = 0.95$), indicating an agreement with psychological and confidence issues. According to Saudi female participants, the least acculturation challenge, on the other hand, was discrimination challenges with a high percentage of disagreement (74.8%) and a mean of 3.12 ($SD = 0.88$), indicating an overall disagreement with the discrimination challenges.

Social challenges. According to Saudi female participants, social challenges were the most difficult acculturation challenge in the United States with an agreement percentage of 59.8% and a mean of 2.29 ($SD = 0.97$), indicating an overall agreement with the social challenges. Analyzing items frequencies and descriptive statistics for this variable, items six (I have many American friends), 23 (I attend and participate in public meetings and private parties where most of the people are Americans), and 13 (I attend and participate in cultural and social events organized by Americans) scored the highest levels of disagreements (69%, 67%, and 62%,

respectively) as presented in Table 13. Saudi female students who participated in this study indicated they did not have many American friends, did not attend and participate in public meetings or private parties where most of the people are Americans, and did not engage in cultural and social events organized by Americans. Item eight (I feel isolated from the American community), on the other hand, scored the lowest levels of agreements (49%), indicating that although Saudi female students did not have many American friends and did participate in cultural or social events, they did not feel that they were isolated from the American society.

Table 13

Items Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics for Social Challenges

Item	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Mean	SD
*6	8	23	41	28	2.89	0.90
8	19	30	37	14	2.46	0.95
*12	17	27	29	27	2.66	1.05
*13	12	26	37	25	2.75	0.96
*23	13	24	42	21	2.71	0.94

Cultural challenges. Cultural challenges were the second most difficult acculturation challenge encountered by Saudi female students in the United States with an agreement percentage of 57.6% and a mean of 2.31 ($SD = 1.05$), indicating an agreement with the cultural challenges. Analyzing items frequencies and descriptive statistics for this variable, items 15 (my educational success depends on my mastery of the English language), 32 (I have more family responsibilities than I had in my country), and 16 (my own culture conflicts with the American culture) scored the highest levels of agreements (87%, 72%, and 63%, respectively) as shown in Table 14. Item three (it is hard to interact with male students because it conflicts with my culture), on the other hand, scored the lowest levels of agreement (29%), indicating that although

Saudi Arabia is sex-segregated society, Saudi female students did not face difficulties interacting with male students.

Table 14

Items Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics for Cultural Challenges

Item	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Mean	SD
3	8	21	36	35	2.98	0.94
9	20	28	34	18	2.5	1.01
15	41	46	11	2	1.74	0.73
16	23	40	25	12	2.26	0.94
32	46	26	17	11	1.93	1.03
34	28	19	31	22	2.47	1.12

Familial obligations. Based on Saudi female participants' responses to the acculturation challenges survey, familial obligations appeared to be the third acculturation challenge facing them in the United States with an agreement percentage of 50% and a mean of 2.51 ($SD = 1.02$), indicating an agreement with the familial obligation challenges. Analyzing items frequencies and descriptive statistics for this variable, items 14 (it is better to be with my family when studying abroad), 20 (it is hard to study in the U.S. when you have kids), and 25 (I prefer to work and study individually) scored the highest levels of agreements (69%, 58%, and 56%, respectively), indicating that although Saudi female students considered having children and studying at the same time to be difficult, they preferred to be with their families when studying in the United States (Table 15). Having children seemed also to affect their academic life as they preferred to study and work individually so they can stay home with their children. Item 19 (it is difficult to make friends in the U.S.), on the other hand, scored the lowest levels of agreement (36%), indicating although Saudi female students spent most of their times with their children, they did not feel that it was difficult to make friends in the United States.

Table 15

Items Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics for Familial Obligations

Item	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Mean	SD
5	15	28	35	22	2.64	0.99
14	36	33	21	10	2.05	0.98
19	12	24	34	30	2.82	0.99
20	16	42	27	15	2.41	0.93
25	22	34	23	21	2.43	1.05
27	13	25	35	27	2.76	0.99

Language and academic difficulties. The fourth acculturation challenge, based on Saudi female participants' opinions, was language and academic difficulties with an agreement percentage of 38.8 % and a mean of 2.78 ($SD = 1.02$), indicating an agreement with language and academic difficulties. Analyzing items frequencies and descriptive statistics for this variable, items 10 (I need to adapt my learning strategies to succeed in the American universities), seven (making friends with Americans depends on my English mastery), and 38 (language is the most difficult challenge in the U.S.) scored the highest levels of agreements (69%, 60%, & 52%, respectively) as presented in Table 16. Items 33 (it is hard to understand the U.S. educational system) and 18 (I feel uncomfortable when there are male classmates), on the other hand, scored the lowest levels of agreements (17% & 23%, respectively). From Saudi female students' responses, it seemed that it was not difficult for them to understand the American educational system, but they only needed to adjust their learning strategies to succeed. Item 21 (I am satisfied with the level of my academic performance) scored a high level of agreement with a percentage of 76%, indicating that Saudi female students expressed an overall satisfaction with their academic experience in the United States.

Table 16

Items Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics for Language and Academic Challenges

Item	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Mean	SD
7	23	37	21	19	2.36	1.03
10	33	36	23	8	2.06	0.94
18	4	19	27	50	3.23	0.89
*21	32	44	17	7	1.99	0.88
28	8	25	24	43	3.02	1.00
29	14	28	21	37	2.81	1.08
33	4	13	47	36	3.15	0.79
38	21	31	27	21	2.48	1.04
39	7	23	38	32	2.95	0.91

Psychological and confidence issues. Psychological and confidence issues were the fifth acculturation challenge facing Saudi female students in the United States with an agreement percentage of 31.4% and a mean of 2.92 ($SD = 0.95$), indicating an agreement with psychological and confidence issues. Analyzing items frequencies and descriptive statistics for psychological and confidence issues, the most difficult challenge was item one (being away from family and friends has a negative influence on my emotions) with an agreement percentage of 52%, as shown in Table 17. The least challenging issues on the other hand, were items 22 (I am pleased about my decision to come to study in the U.S.) and 36 (I feel more self-confident after the recent changes in Saudi Arabia in general, and in women's role in particular) with agreement percentages of 94% and 85%, respectively. From these responses, it can be clearly seen Saudi female students were highly pleased about their decision to study in the United States and greatly satisfied with their experiences. They also reported increased self-confidence after the recent changes, including the empowerment of women's role, in Saudi Arabia.

Table 17

Items Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics for Psychological Issues and Confidence

Item	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Mean	SD
1	15	37	39	9	2.42	0.85
*11	16	37	34	13	2.44	0.91
*22	72	22	5	1	1.35	0.62
*30	22	41	25	12	2.27	0.94
*36	47	38	10	5	1.73	0.83

Discrimination challenges. According to Saudi female participants, the least acculturation challenge in the United States was discrimination challenges with a high percentage of disagreement (74.8%) and a mean of 3.12 ($SD = 0.88$), indicating an overall disagreement with the discrimination challenges. Analyzing items frequencies and descriptive statistics for this variable, items 41 (people in the U.S. are rude to me because of my hijab), 26 (the American culture has a negative impact on my psychological health), and 17 (people in the U.S. avoid talking to me because of my hijab) scored the highest levels of disagreements (89%, 82%, and 80%, respectively) as presented in Table 18. Item 37 (I have heard racist comments from people in the U.S.), on the other hand, scored the lowest levels of disagreement with a percentage of 55%, which still represent more than half of the participants. From Saudi female students' responses, discrimination challenges appeared to be the least challenging issue facing Saudi female students in the United States.

Table 18

Items Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics for Discrimination Challenges

Item	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Mean	SD
2	1	24	30	45	3.19	0.83
17	6	14	35	45	3.19	0.89
26	3	15	37	45	3.24	0.81
37	11	34	32	23	2.67	0.95
40	4	28	29	39	3.03	0.91

Table 18 Continued

Item	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Mean	SD
41	0	11	38	51	3.4	0.68

Comparison of Acculturation Challenges

A Related-Samples Friedman’s Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks was used to determine whether scores on the six factors differed. The results showed that the distribution of scores among the six factors was significantly different, $\chi^2(5) = 158.072$, ($p < .000$). Pairwise comparisons were performed with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. There were many significant differences. Cultural challenges were rated significantly higher than language and academic difficulties, psychological and confidence issues, and discrimination challenges ($p < .000$). Social challenges were also rated significantly higher than language and academic difficulties, psychological and confidence issues, and discrimination challenges ($p < .000$). Family obligations were rated significantly higher than language and academic difficulties ($p < .018$). Family obligations were also significantly higher than psychological and confidence issues, and discrimination challenges ($p < .000$). Language and academic difficulties were rated significantly higher than discrimination challenges ($p < .000$). The median scores for each of the three factors are displayed below (Table 19).

Table 19

Median Scores for each of the Six Factors

Factor	Social challenges	Cultural challenges	Familial obligations	Language and academic difficulties	Psychological and confidence issues	Discriminations challenges
Median	2.30	2.17	2.50	2.78	2.90	3.17

Role of Demographic Variables on Participants' Challenges

Following the factor analysis, statistical tests were conducted to determine whether any demographic variables impacted Saudi female participants perceptions of their acculturation challenges in the United States. Analysis of the participant scores for the six factors identified in the factor analysis (Social challenges, Cultural challenges, Familial obligations, Language and academic difficulties, Psychological and confidence issues, and Discrimination challenges) was carried out. Examination of box-plots indicated for each demographic variable, there were several univariate and multivariate outliers. Visual examination of normal Q-Q plots indicated that the data were severely skewed. The Wilks-Shapiro test showed multiple non-normal distributions for four of the six demographic variables. MANOVA is relatively resilient to violations of normal distribution if there are 30 or more observations per cell. But because several of the groupings for demographic variables in these data resulted in cell sizes of less than 30, non-normal data distributions raised the risk of Type I errors (finding a significant difference where none exists). The correlation matrix indicated the variables did not all correlate with one another, indicating non-linear relationships among response variables.

Based on this, it was determined that these data were a poor fit for parametric MANOVA. Instead, non-parametric Kuskall-Wallis H was used for variables with more than two levels (Age, Regions of origins in Saudi Arabia, Regions of residence in the US, Length of residence in the US, Level of education, English skills self-rating), and Mann Whitney U was used for variables with only two levels (Big city or small town, Previous overseas experiences, Marital status, Children). Both of these tests are performed based on the median instead of the mean, and so are not influenced by outliers in small cells. They also do not rely on a normal

distribution, nor do they require source data to be linearly related. Median scores for each demographic variable are presented below.

Age. A Kuskal-Wallis H test was used to determine whether participants from the different age groups (18-22, 23-29, 30-39, 40 and above) reported different levels of acculturation challenges while studying in the United States (see Table 20).

Table 20

Median Scores for the Six Factors based on Participants' Age Groups

Age	Social challenges	Cultural Challenges	Familial obligations	Language and academic difficulties	Psychological and confidence issues	Discrimination challenges
18-22	2.00	2.17	2.50	2.67	2.80	3.00
23-29	2.20	2.33	2.50	2.78	2.80	3.17
30-39	2.60	2.33	2.67	2.78	3.00	3.17
40+	2.80	2.17	2.50	2.44	3.60	3.67
Total	2.30	2.17	2.50	2.78	2.90	3.17

Distributions of acculturation challenges scores for each of the six factors (Social challenges, Cultural challenges, Familial obligations, Language and academic difficulties, Psychological and confidence issues, and Discrimination challenges) were similar for each of the four age groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Median scores were not significantly different among the groups for Cultural challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 2.84, p = .42$), Familial obligations ($\chi^2(3) = .621, p = .89$), Language and academic difficulties ($\chi^2(3) = 1.09, p = .78$), Psychological and confidence issues ($\chi^2(3) = 4.81, p = .19$), and Discrimination challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 1.27, p = .74$). A significant effect of age was found for social challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 8.34, p = .04$), indicating that the younger the participants were, the more social challenges they had in the United States. The

overall model for social challenges indicated significant effects, however, no pairwise comparison was significant ($p = .08$) as it approached, but did not reach significance.

Regions of origin in Saudi Arabia. A Kuskal-Wallis H test was used to determine whether participants from the five different regions of Saudi Arabia (North, South, East, West, and Central) reported different levels of acculturation challenges while studying in the United States (see Table 21).

Table 21

Median Scores for the Six Factors based on Participants' Regions of Origin

From	Social challenges	Cultural challenges	Familia obligations	Language and academic difficulties	Psychological and confidence issues	Discrimination challenges
North	2.40	2.50	2.50	2.67	2.60	2.83
South	2.20	1.83	2.33	2.22	3.00	3.08
East	2.20	2.67	2.67	2.89	2.80	3.00
West	2.40	2.17	2.50	2.78	3.00	3.00
Central	2.30	2.25	2.42	2.83	2.80	3.42
Total	2.30	2.17	2.50	2.78	2.90	3.17

Distributions of acculturation challenges scores for each of the six factors (Social challenges, Cultural challenges, Familial obligations, Language and academic difficulties, Psychological and confidence issues, and Discrimination challenges) were similar for each of the five regions of origin groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Median scores were not significantly different among the groups for any of Social challenges ($\chi^2(4) = 1.22, p = .88$), Familial obligations ($\chi^2(4) = 4.88, p = .29$), Language and academic difficulties ($\chi^2(4) = 6.57, p = .16$), Psychological and confidence issues ($\chi^2(4) = 4.25, p = .37$), and Discrimination challenges ($\chi^2(4) = 2.76, p = .37$). Median scores for Cultural challenges ($\chi^2(4) = 9.13, p = .06$) approached, but did not reach significance.

Regions of residence in the US. A Kuskal-Wallis H test was used to determine whether participants from the four different regions of the United States (Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, and West) reported different levels of acculturation challenges while studying in the United States (see Table 22).

Table 22

Median Scores for the Six Factors based on Participants' Regions of Residence

Live in	Social challenges	Cultural challenges	Familia obligations	Language and academic difficulties	Psychological and confidence issues	Discrimination challenges
Northeast	2.20	2.33	2.50	3.00	2.80	3.33
Southeast	2.40	2.17	2.50	2.67	3.00	3.00
Midwest	2.00	2.17	2.17	2.56	2.60	2.67
West	2.70	2.17	2.58	2.72	3.10	3.42
Total	2.30	2.17	2.50	2.78	2.90	3.17

Distributions of acculturation challenges scores for each of the six factors (Social challenges, Cultural challenges, Familial obligations, Language and academic difficulties, Psychological and confidence issues, and Discrimination challenges) were similar for each of the four of the United States regions groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Median scores were not significantly different among the groups for any of Social challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 4.84, p = .18$), Cultural challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 4.06, p = .26$), Familial obligations ($\chi^2(3) = 2.52, p = .47$), Language and academic difficulties ($\chi^2(3) = 2.82, p = .42$), and Psychological and confidence issues ($\chi^2(3) = 2.19, p = .53$). Median scores for Discrimination challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 6.63, p = .09$) approached, but did not reach significance.

Big city or small town. A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in acculturation challenges reported by Saudi female students studying in large cities and small towns in the United States (see Table 23).

Table 23

Median Scores for the Six Factors based on Where the Participants Live

Live in	Social challenges	Cultural challenges	Familial obligations	Language and academic difficulties	Psychological and confidence issues	Discrimination challenges
Big city	2.40	2.33	2.50	2.89	3.00	3.33
Small town	2.20	2.17	2.50	2.67	2.80	3.00
Total	2.30	2.17	2.50	2.78	2.90	3.17

Distributions of acculturation challenges scores for each of the six factors (Social challenges, Cultural challenges, Familial obligations, Language and academic difficulties, Psychological and confidence issues, and Discrimination challenges) were similar for students in large cities and small towns, as assessed by visual inspection. The median scores were not statistically significantly different between students studying in big cities and small towns for Familial obligations ($U = 1165$, $z = -.505$, $p = .61$), Cultural challenges ($U = 1032$, $z = -1.43$, $p = .15$), and Language and academic difficulties ($U = 1047$, $z = -1.32$, $p = .19$) using an exact sampling distribution for U . The median scores differed significantly for Social challenges ($U = 906$, $z = -2.30$, $p = .02$), indicating that Saudi female students who lived in small towns encountered more social challenges than those who lived in big cities. Median scores also differed significantly for Psychological and confidence issues ($U = 806$, $z = -3.02$, $p = .003$), indicating participants who lived in small towns encountered more psychological and confidence issues than those who lived in big cities. Median scores also differed significantly for Discrimination challenges ($U = 905$, $z = -2.31$, $p = .02$), indicating participants who lived in small towns faced more discrimination than those who lived in big cities.

Length of residence in the US. A Kuskal-Wallis H test was used to determine whether participants' different length of residence in the United States (Less than 1 year, 1-2 years, 3-5 years, and more than 5 years) influenced their acculturation challenges (see Table 24).

Table 24

Median Scores for the Six Factors based on Participants' Length of Residence in the US

Length of residence	Social challenges	Cultural challenges	Familial obligations	Language and academic difficulties	Psychological and confidence issues	Discrimination challenges
Less than 1 year	2.30	2.17	2.42	2.61	2.90	3.08
1-2 years	2.20	2.50	2.67	2.89	3.00	3.33
3-5 years	2.40	2.17	2.50	2.78	2.80	3.17
More than 5 years	2.50	2.42	2.33	2.61	2.90	2.83
Total	2.30	2.17	2.50	2.78	2.90	3.17

Distributions of acculturation challenges scores for each of the six factors (Social challenges, Cultural challenges, Familial obligations, Language and academic difficulties, Psychological and confidence issues, and Discrimination challenges) were similar for each of the four length of residence in the United States groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Median scores were not significantly different among the groups for any of Social challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 1.95, p = .58$), Cultural challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 3.35, p = .34$), Familial obligations ($\chi^2(3) = 4.44, p = .22$), Language and academic difficulties ($\chi^2(3) = .445, p = .93$), Psychological and confidence issues ($\chi^2(3) = .625, p = .89$), and Discrimination challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 4.70, p = .19$).

Previous overseas experiences. A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in acculturation challenges reported by Saudi female students who have been in other countries before coming to the United States and those who have not (see Table 25).

Table 25

Median Scores for the Six Factors based on Participants' Previous Overseas Experiences

Been in other countries	Social challenges	Cultural challenges	Familia obligations	Language and academic difficulties	Psychological and confidence issues	Discrimination challenges
Yes	2.20	2.17	2.67	2.78	2.80	3.17
No	2.40	2.33	2.50	2.78	3.00	3.17
Total	2.30	2.17	2.50	2.78	2.90	3.17

Distributions of acculturation challenges scores for each of the six factors (Social challenges, Cultural challenges, Familial obligations, Language and academic difficulties, Psychological and confidence issues, and Discrimination challenges) were similar for students who have been in other countries and students who have not, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Median scores were not significantly different between students who have been in other countries and those who have not for Social challenges ($U = 1300$, $z = 1.18$, $p = .24$), Cultural challenges ($U = 1205$, $z = .490$, $p = .62$), Familial obligations ($U = 1054$, $z = -.607$, $p = .54$), Language and academic difficulties ($U = 1179$, $z = .300$, $p = .76$), and Discrimination challenges ($U = 1094$, $z = -.316$, $p = .75$). Median scores differed significantly for Psychological and confidence issues ($U = 1469$, $z = 2.42$, $p = .02$), indicating Saudi female students who have been in other countries before coming to the United States encountered more psychological and confidence issues than students who have not been in other countries.

Level of education. A Kuskal-Wallis H test was used to determine whether participants' different levels of education (ELC, Bachelors, Masters, and Doctorate) influenced their acculturation challenges in the United States (see Table 26).

Table 26

Median Scores for the Six Factors based on Participants' Levels of Education

Education	Social challenges	Cultural challenges	Familial obligations	Language and academic difficulties	Psychological and confidence issues	Discrimination challenges
ELC	2.20	2.17	2.50	2.33	2.90	3.00
Bachelors	2.40	2.08	2.67	2.72	2.80	3.17
Masters	2.30	2.17	2.42	2.89	2.90	3.00
Doctorate	2.80	2.58	2.33	3.22	3.10	3.25
Total	2.30	2.17	2.50	2.78	2.90	3.17

Distributions of acculturation challenges scores for each of the six factors (Social challenges, Cultural challenges, Familial obligations, Language and academic difficulties, Psychological and confidence issues, and Discrimination challenges) were similar for each of the four education level groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Median scores were not significantly different among the groups for Familial challenges ($\chi^2(3) = .851, p = .84$), Psychological and confidence issues ($\chi^2(3) = 3.95, p = .27$), and Discrimination challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 1.32, p = .72$). Median scores for Cultural challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 6.59, p = .09$) approached, but did not reach significance. Median scores differed significantly for Social challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 9.14, p = .03$), indicating students enrolled in English language centers and master's programs encountered more social challenges than students enrolled in bachelors and doctorate programs. The overall model for social challenges indicated significant effects, however, no pairwise comparison was significant ($p = .09$) as it approached, but did not reach significance. Median scores also differed significantly for Language and academic difficulties ($\chi^2(3) = 18.7, p = .000$), indicating students enrolled in English language centers and bachelors programs faced more language and academic difficulties than students enrolled masters and

doctorate programs. The overall model for language and academic difficulties indicated significant effects, however, no pairwise comparison was significant ($p = .19$).

English skills self-rating. A Kuskal-Wallis H test was used to determine whether participants' English skills self-rating (OK, Good, Very good, and Excellent) influenced their acculturation challenges in the United States (see Table 27).

Table 27

Median Scores for the Six Factors based on Participants' English Skills Self-rating

English skills	Social challenges	Cultural challenges	Familia obligations	Language and academic difficulties	Psychological and confidence issues	Discrimination challenges
OK	2.00	2.00	2.67	2.11	2.80	2.83
Good	2.20	2.17	2.50	2.56	2.80	3.17
Very good	2.40	2.33	2.50	2.89	3.00	3.17
Excellent	2.80	2.67	2.67	3.44	3.20	3.33
Total	2.30	2.17	2.50	2.78	2.90	3.17

Distributions of acculturation challenges scores for each of the six factors (Social challenges, Cultural challenges, Familial obligations, Language and academic difficulties, Psychological and confidence issues, and Discrimination challenges) were similar for each of the five English skills self-rating groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Median scores were not significantly different among the groups for Familial obligations ($\chi^2(3) = 1.18, p = .76$), Psychological and confidence issues ($\chi^2(3) = 5.59, p = .13$), and Discrimination challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 5.79, p = .12$). Median scores differed significantly for Social challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 8.63, p = .04$) indicating students who rated their English skills “good” and “ok” encountered more social challenges than students who rated their English skills “very good” and “excellent”. The lower the participants rated their English skills, the more social challenges they had. The overall model for social challenges indicated significant effects, however, no pairwise

comparison was significant ($p = .08$) as it approached, but did not reach significance. Median scores also differed significantly for Cultural challenges ($\chi^2(3) = 8.44, p = .04$) indicating students who rated their English skills “ok” and “good” encountered more cultural challenges than students who rated their English skills “very good” and “excellent”. The lower the participants rated their English skills, the more cultural challenges they had. The overall model for cultural challenges indicated significant effects, however, no pairwise comparison was significant ($p = .08$) as it approached, but did not reach significance. Median scores also differed significantly for Language and academic difficulties ($\chi^2(3) = 29.6, p = .000$) indicating students who rated their English skills “ok” and “good” faced more language and academic difficulties than students who rated their English skills “very good” and “excellent”. The lower the participants rated their English skills, the more language and academic difficulties they had. The overall model for language and academic difficulties indicated significant effects, however, no pairwise comparison was significant ($p = .29$).

Marital status. A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in acculturation challenges reported by Saudi female students who were married and single (see Table 28).

Table 28

Median Scores for the Six Factors based on Participants' Marital Status

Marital Status	Social challenges	Cultural challenges	Familial obligations	Language and academic difficulties	Psychological and confidence issues	Discrimination challenges
Married	2.20	2.17	2.33	2.67	2.80	3.17
Single	2.60	2.50	2.67	2.89	3.00	3.33
Total	2.30	2.17	2.50	2.78	2.90	3.17

Distributions of acculturation challenges scores for each of the six factors (Social challenges, Cultural challenges, Familial obligations, Language and academic difficulties,

Psychological and confidence issues, and Discrimination challenges) were similar for married and single students, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Median scores were not significantly different between married and single students for Familial obligations ($U = 1275$, $z = 1.54$, $p = .12$), Language and academic difficulties ($U = 1235$, $z = 1.24$, $p = .22$), Psychological and confidence issues ($U = 1182$, $z = .846$, $p = .39$), and Discrimination challenges ($U = 1049$, $z = -.150$, $p = .88$). Median scores differed significantly for Social challenges ($U = 1433$, $z = 2.72$, $p = .01$) indicating married students faced more social challenges than single students. Median scores also differed significantly for Cultural challenges ($U = 1483$, $z = 3.09$, $p = .002$) indicating married students encountered more cultural challenges than single students.

Children. A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in acculturation challenges reported by Saudi female students who had children and those who did not (see Table 29).

Table 29

Median Scores for the Six Factors based on whether Participants had children

Children	Social challenges	Cultural challenges	Familia obligations	Language and academic difficulties	Psychological and confidence issues	Discrimination challenges
Yes	2.20	2.17	2.33	2.67	2.80	3.00
No	2.40	2.50	2.67	2.78	3.00	3.33
Total	2.30	2.17	2.50	2.78	2.90	3.17

Distributions of acculturation challenges scores for each of the six factors (Social challenges, Cultural challenges, Familial obligations, Language and academic difficulties, Psychological and confidence issues, and Discrimination challenges) were similar for students who had children and students who did not, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Median scores were not significantly different between students who had children and students who did not for any of Social challenges ($U = 1380$, $z = 1.20$, $p = .23$), Familial obligations ($U =$

1372, $z = 1.14$, $p = .25$), Language and academic difficulties ($U = 1219$, $z = .067$, $p = .95$), Psychological and confidence issues ($U = 1298$, $z = .626$, $p = .53$), and Discrimination challenges ($U = 1222$, $z = .091$, $p = .93$). Median scores for Cultural challenges ($U = 1456$, $z = 1.74$, $p = .08$) approached, but did not reach significance.

Summary and Discussion of Major Findings

The primary purpose of the first phase of the present study was to explore the acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States, and whether their backgrounds and demographic variables have any effect on the acculturation challenges they face. This section will summarize and discuss the quantitative survey results in relation to the first and second research questions, connect the findings with existing literature, and explain how the findings fit into the theoretical framework used in this study: The Cultural Dimension Theory (Hofstede, 2001); The Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1983) and The Culture Shock Theory (Oberg, 1960).

To address the first research question (What are the sociocultural, academic, and psychological acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female international students in the United States?), a descriptive analysis was applied to explain the frequency of each of the six variables of the acculturation challenges and the mean and standard deviation of each factor. A descriptive analysis was also applied to explain the frequency of each item of each factor and the mean and standard deviation of each item. Analysis of the six variables of the acculturation challenges facing Saudi female students in the United States including; (a) discrimination challenges; (b) language and academic difficulties; (c) social challenges; (d) cultural challenges; (e) familial obligations; and (f) psychological and confidence issues revealed social challenges were the most difficult acculturation challenge in the United States with a high agreement

percentage of 59.8% and a mean of 2.29 ($SD = 0.97$), indicating an overall agreement with the social challenges. The second most difficult acculturation challenge, according to Saudi female students, was cultural challenges with an agreement percentage of 57.6 % and a mean of 2.31 ($SD = 1.05$), indicating an agreement with the cultural challenges. Familial obligations appeared to be the third acculturation challenge facing Saudi female students in the United States with an agreement percentage of 50% and a mean of 2.51 ($SD = 1.02$), indicating an agreement with the familial obligation challenges. The fourth acculturation challenge was language and academic difficulties with an agreement percentage of 38.8 % and a mean of 2.78 ($SD = 1.02$), indicating an agreement with language and academic difficulties. Psychological and confidence issues were the fifth acculturation challenge with an agreement percentage of 31.4 % and a mean of 2.92 ($SD = 0.95$), indicating an agreement with psychological and confidence issues. According to Saudi female participants, the least acculturation challenge, on the other hand, was discrimination challenges with a high percentage of disagreement (74.8%) and a mean of 3.12 ($SD = 0.88$), indicating an overall disagreement with the discrimination challenges (Figure 5).

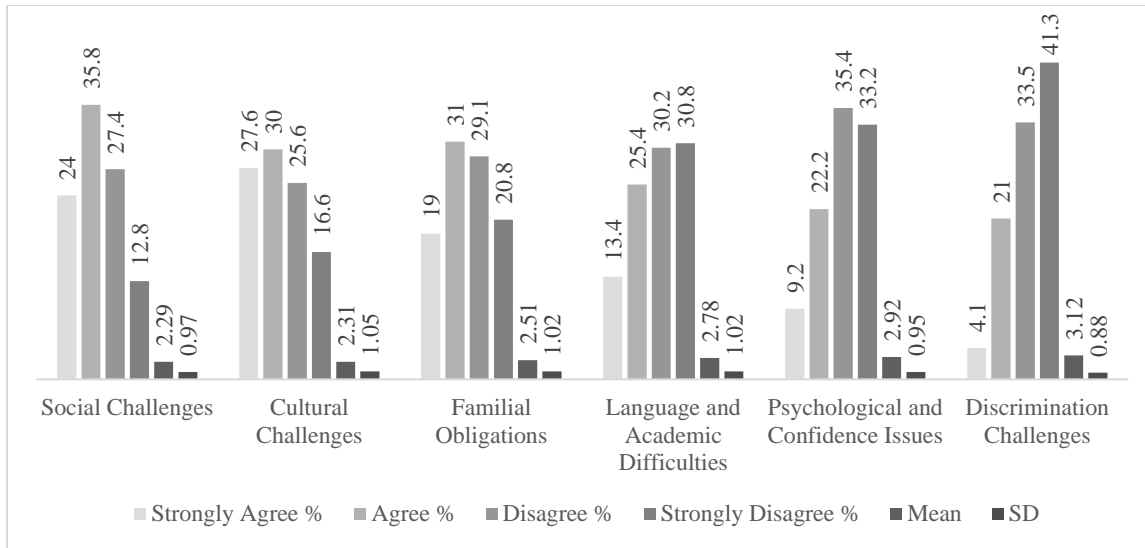


Figure 5. Frequency of Saudi Female Students' Acculturation Challenges in the US.

Analyzing Saudi female students' social challenges in the United States, 69% of the participants indicated that they did not have many American friends, and 49% mentioned they felt isolated from the American community. While getting involved with the American society and making friends are considered essential in the acculturation process of international students, Saudi female students seemed to face difficulties engaging with the American community. LeBaron and Hausheer (2013) indicated Saudi students tend to isolate themselves as they usually prefer to live alone or with other Saudi students. LeBaron and Hausheer (2013) explained it is challenging for Saudi women to get involved in the American society and make friends because of the stereotypes surrounding Saudi and Muslim women. What also prevents Saudi female students from getting involved with the American society and making friends is their multiple roles and responsibilities as students, wives, and mothers (Zhang, 2016). Most of the participants in the present study indicated they did not attend and participate in social and cultural events (62%) or take advantage of volunteering opportunities (56%). Zang (2016) stated instead of taking advantage of conversation partners, group work, volunteer opportunities,

university events, and other library services which other international students may benefit from, Saudi female students commonly spend most of their time working individually at home.

For cultural challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States, 63% of the participants mentioned there was a conflict between their own culture and the American culture. Valdes (1986) stated the acculturation process of international students is highly influenced by the degrees of differences and similarities between their home culture and the new culture. For Saudi female students, therefore, coming from one of the most conservative countries around the world to a completely open and free society present a real challenge. Due to the restrictions on women's role in Saudi Arabia, Saudi female international students in the United States face numerous challenges and difficulties adapting to the American culture. Unlike what is mentioned in the literature review, however, moving from single-sex schools to mixed-gender educational environment presents numerous educational, social, cultural, and emotional challenges for Saudi students (Alhazmi, 2013) and 71% of the participants in the present study stated it was not difficult for them to interact with male students.

Discussing familial challenges facing Saudi female students in the United States, 58% of the participants indicated it was difficult to study in the United States when they have children. Most Saudi female international students in the United States are students, wives, and mothers and, therefore, it is very challenging for them to balance between their school work, social life, and responsibilities at home as wives and mothers (Zhang, 2016). According to Redden (2013), for many Saudi international students, their families come first before their academic work (Redden, 2013). As a result, Saudi female students tend to spend most of their time working individually at home instead of taking advantage of conversation partners, group work, workshops, and other library services that may benefit international students (Zang, 2016). Fifty

six percent of the participants stated they preferred to work and study individually as they probably needed to spend more time at home with their families and children. Although Saudi female students struggle to balance between academic work and family responsibilities, 69% of the participants mentioned it is better to be with family when studying abroad. According to The Cultural Dimension Theory, members of collectivistic cultures are more culturally independent, connected, and cooperated (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). As Saudi female students come from a collectivistic culture, they seemed to be strongly attached to their families (Macias, 2016).

For Saudi female students' language and academic difficulties, 52% of the participants believed that language was the most difficult challenge in the United States. According to Baek and Damarin (2008), language barrier is one of the most difficult academic challenges most international students encounter. Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) stated language proficiency plays a significant role in the acculturation and adjustment process of Saudi female students in the United States. Baek and Damarin (2008) also mentioned language proficiency has a great influence on international students' self-confidence and academic performance. Besides language barrier, 69% of the participants explained they needed to adapt their learning strategies to succeed in the American universities. Some of the academic challenges facing international students are the different teaching and learning styles, the different expectations about teachers' and students' roles in the classroom, and the expected level of students' engagement and participation (Carroll & Ryan, 2005). Coming from different educational backgrounds, international students face major problems coping with the new educational system that is completely different from the one they used to in their home country (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1998). For Saudi female students, Macias (2016) further stated transitioning from an educational system in which students are recipients to a completely different one in which students are much

more active can present a real challenge. Despite Saudi female students' language and academic difficulties, 76% of the participants mentioned they were satisfied with their level of academic performance.

In discussing Saudi female students' psychological and confidence issues in the United States, fifty two percent of the participants indicated being away from family and friends was the most difficult psychological issue as it negatively influenced their emotions. As Saudi female students come from a collectivistic culture and are strongly connected to their families, being away from them can affect them emotionally (Macias, 2016). In spite of the challenges facing Saudi female students, 94% of the participants mentioned they were pleased about their decision to study in the United States. Eighty five percent of the participants indicated they felt more self-confident after the recent changes in Saudi Arabia and the empowerment of the role of Saudi women in the country.

In analyzing discrimination challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States, 89% of the participants indicated they did not feel people in the United States were rude to them because of their hijab, 82% mentioned the American culture did not have a negative impact on their psychological health, and 80% stated people in the United States did not avoid talking to them because of their hijab. From Saudi female students' responses to the acculturation challenges survey, most of the participants did not face discrimination against them because of their hijab and Muslim identity in the United States.

This finding aligns with the existing literature review on Saudi women's experiences in the United States as Hakami (2012) found that Saudi female students' religious challenges related to their hijab and Muslim identity appeared to be one of the least challenging issues in the United States. Most of the Saudi female participants in Davis' (2014) study mentioned they had not

experienced any type of discrimination and “even those participants who had experienced discrimination often emphasized that it was very uncommon, and most people were kind, accepting, and interested, while only a few people were unkind to them” (p. 29). In the same vein, Al Remeih (2017) stated while some of her participants mentioned they faced racism in the United States because of their hijab, other participants confirmed “Americans are friendly and accepting to everyone” (p. 63).

Addressing the second research question (Do the Saudi female students’ backgrounds and demographic variables have any effect on the acculturation challenges they face?), Kuskall-Wallis H and Mann Whitney U were used to examine the relationship between Saudi female students’ demographic information and the acculturation challenges they encounter in the United States. While the participants’ demographic variables of Age, Living in big city or small town, Previous overseas experiences, Educational level, English skills self-rating, and Marital status significantly influenced Saudi female students’ acculturation challenges in the United States, there was no significant relationship between participants’ acculturation challenges and their Regions of origins in Saudi Arabia, Regions of residence in the United States, Length of residence in the United States, and Children. Participants’ demographic variables with significant effects are discussed below.

Examining the role of Age in participants’ acculturation challenges, a significant effect was found for *social challenges* ($p = .04$). This result was an indication that the younger the participants were, the more social challenges they had in the United States. The overall test was significant, however, no pairwise difference rose to the level of significance ($p = .08$).

For the differences in acculturation challenges reported by Saudi female students studying in big cities and small towns in the United States, a significant effect was found for

social challenges ($p = .02$). This result was an indication that Saudi female students who lived in small towns encountered more social challenges than those who lived in big cities. Another significant effect was found for *psychological and confidence issues* ($p = .003$). This was an indication that participants who lived in small towns encountered more psychological and confidence issues than those who lived in big cities. A significant effect was also found for *discrimination challenges* ($p = .02$), indicating that participants who lived in small towns faced more discrimination than those who lived in big cities.

Exploring whether there were differences in acculturation challenges reported by Saudi female students who have been in other countries before coming to the United States and those who have not, a significant effect was found for *psychological and confidence issues* ($p = .02$), indicating that Saudi female students who have been in other countries before coming to the United States encountered more psychological and confidence issues than students who have not been in other countries. This was the opposite of what was expected, as students who have been in other countries and were introduced to other cultures are expected to be more flexible and open to other cultures and therefore encounter less acculturation challenges than those who have never been in other countries. One explanation could be for those students who have been in other countries, they have been away from their families and friends for a longer time and therefore encountered more psychological and confidence issues.

Examining the role of education level on participants' acculturation challenges, a significant effect was found for *social challenges* ($p = .03$), indicating students enrolled in English Language Centers (ELC) and masters programs encountered more social challenges than students enrolled in bachelors and doctorate programs. This might be interpreted in relation to the number of years studying in the United States more than a level of education, as the number

of years in ELC and masters programs are fewer than the number of years in bachelors and doctorate programs. Saudi female students who spent fewer years studying in the United States encountered more social challenges than those who spent more years. While the overall model for social challenges indicated significant effects, no pairwise comparison rose to the level of significance ($p = .09$). Another significant effect was found for *language and academic difficulties* ($p = .000$), indicating students enrolled in ELC and bachelors programs faced more language and academic difficulties than students enrolled in masters and doctorate programs. The more education the participants had, the less language and academic difficulties they encountered. While the overall model for language and academic difficulties indicated significant effects, no pairwise comparison was significant ($p = .19$).

Investigating whether participants' English skills self-rating influenced their acculturation challenges in the United States, a significant effect was found for *social challenges* ($p = .04$) indicating that participant who rated their English skills lower than other students encountered more social challenges. The lower the participants rated their English skills, the more social challenges they experienced. While the overall model for social challenges indicated significant effects, no pairwise comparison rose to the level of significance ($p = .08$). Another significant effect was found for *cultural challenges* ($p = .04$) indicating students who rated their English skills lower than other students encountered more cultural challenges. The lower the participants rated their English skills, the more cultural challenges they faced. While the overall model for cultural challenges indicated significant effects, no pairwise difference rose to the level of significance ($p = .08$). A significant effect was also found for *language and academic difficulties* ($p = .000$) indicating students who rated their English skills lower than other students faced more language and academic difficulties. The lower the participants rated their English skills, the

more language and academic difficulties they had. The overall model for language and academic difficulties indicated significant effects, however, no pairwise comparison was significant ($p = .29$).

Analyzing the role of Saudi female students' marital status on their acculturation challenges in the United States, a significant effect was found for *social challenges* ($p = .01$). This result was an indication that married students faced more social challenges than single students and can be explained by what Zang (2016) mentioned regarding Saudi female students' multiple roles and responsibilities as students, wives, and mothers which usually prevent them from getting involved with the American society and making friends. Another significant effect was found for *cultural challenges* ($p = .002$) indicating married students encountered more cultural challenges than single students.

Chapter 5: Qualitative Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter reports and summarizes the qualitative data gathered from the interviews and the major findings which answer the first, third, and fourth research questions:

1. What are the sociocultural, academic, and psychological acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female international students in the United States?
3. How do Saudi female international students cope with their acculturation challenges?
4. Do the historical changes the country of Saudi Arabia experienced during the last 2 years in the women's role have any influence on Saudi female students' experiences in the United States and how they perceive themselves?

Chapter 5 begins by presenting the demographic information of the Saudi female students who participated in the interview. The nine main themes which emerged from the data analysis are discussed, which are: (a) Making the decision to study in the United States; (b) Adaptation to the American culture; (c) Social challenges; (d) Language challenges; (e) The role of hijab and Muslim identity; (f) Academic challenges; (g) Familial challenges; (h) Vision 2030 and (i) Life experience in the United States. Chapter 5 concludes with a summary and discussion of the major findings.

Participants' Demographics

Six Saudi female students who live and study in different parts of the United States agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews that were conducted in the participants' first language, Arabic. Based on participants' location and preference, three interviews were conducted face-to-face, while the other three were conducted online via skype. With a permission from the participants, all six interviews were audio recorded. The age of the six Saudi female students who participated in the interviews ranged from 24-35 years old. They

came from four regions of Saudi Arabia; Eastern region, Western region, Southern region, and Central region. For the level of education, four of the participants were in PhD programs, one of the participants was in a Master program, and one was in a Bachelor program. For the participants' length of residence in the United States, the time they have been in the United States ranged from 5-8 years. While one of the participants was single, the other four were married. All married participants had 1-3 children. Table 30 presents the demographic information of the participants.

Table 30

Interview Participants' Demographics

Participant	Age	Region of Saudi Arabia	Current level of education	Length of residence in the US	Marital status	Children
Noor	24	Eastern	Bachelor	5 years	Single	No
Hadeel	30	Western	PhD	6 years	Married	Yes, 2
Amal	32	Southern	PhD	8 years	Married	Yes, 3
Nada	26	Western	Master	5 years	Married	Yes, 1
Sara	29	Central	PhD	6 years	Married	Yes, 2
Mona	35	Western	PhD	7 years	Married	Yes, 2

Main Themes

After transcribing and translating the six interviews, data were transferred into NVivo 12 software to be organized and analyzed. In the beginning of the process of analysis, the transcripts were quickly read, and notes were taken on the topics covered in the interview by writing down a list of single words (Heigham & Croker, 2009). A more careful and analytical process of coding by identifying themes, categories, and breaking down the interviews into small chunks was performed (Heigham & Croker, 2009). From the data coding and analysis, nine primary themes emerged in relation to Saudi female students' experiences in the United States and the acculturation challenges they encounter. The nine main themes that were identified were as follows: (a) Making the decision to study in the United States; (b) Adaptation to the American

culture; (c) Social challenges; (d) Language challenges; (e) The role of hijab and Muslim identity; (f) Academic challenges; (g) Familial challenges; (h) Vision 2030 and (i) Life experience in the United States. Each of these themes was explored from the Saudi female students' views, opinions, feelings, and thoughts about their experiences in the United States, the acculturation challenges they encounter, and their own strategies of adjustment.

Making the decision to study in the United States. For making the decision to study in the United States, the participants were asked whether the United States was their first choice to complete their studies and why (Participants' decision before experiencing the life in the United States). They were also asked if they would make the same decision if they go back in time and why (Participants' decision after experiencing the life in the United States).

Participants' decision before experiencing the life in the United States. There were three main factors contributed to Saudi female students' decision to study in the United States when they were in Saudi Arabia and before experiencing the life in the United States: (a) having a family member in the United States; (b) the value of obtaining a degree from an American university and (c) familiarity with the American culture.

Having a family member in the United States. Considering family and thinking about family members when making decisions is not unusual way of thinking for Saudis who belong to a collectivistic culture and are strongly attached to their families. Four of the participants indicated their decision to choose the United States to complete their studies was because one of their family members was studying there. Saudi female students, therefore, seem to be very attached and connected to their family in a way that can greatly influence their lives and decisions. Noor stated the following, "The US was my first choice to complete my studies because my sister was already studying there. So, I wanted to complete my bachelor's degree

and be with my sister at the same time”. Similar to Noor’s response, Hadeel, Sara, and Nada said one of the reasons they chose the United States to complete their studies was because they had a family member (e.g. a sister, a brother, and a husband) who was studying in the United States.

The value of obtaining a degree from an American university. Another reason for selecting Saudi female students the United States as their first option to complete their studies was because the great value of obtaining a degree from an American university and how it is highly appreciated in the Saudi job market. When Hadeel was asked whether the United States was her first choice to complete her studies, she indicated the following, “Yes, the US was my first choice for many reasons. Having a degree from the U.S. would help me get the job I want in Saudi Arabia and make me a strong candidate”. In the same vein, Amal stated, “The US was my first choice to complete my studies. Having a degree from an American university is very appreciated in my country and would help me in my job”. Having a degree from an American university is not only helpful for those who are looking for jobs, but also for those who have jobs and are already employed like Amal. The participant further explained having a degree from the United States would help her in her career advancement.

Familiarity with the American culture. One of the factors that contributed to Saudi female students’ decision to study in the United States was their familiarity with the American culture. When Mona was asked about her decision to study in the United States, she stated,

The US was my first option to complete my studies because I was very familiar with the American culture. I loved it and felt so attached to it since childhood as I grew up watching American movies, series, and songs. Also, life expenses are affordable here and Americans are friendly.

Similar to Mona's response, Hadeel indicated that the following,

Another reason that made me choose the US was because I know a lot about the American culture from movies, songs, and talk shows. I thought that going to a country that I know a lot about would be much easier and less frustrating than going to a country I don't know anything about.

From Mona's and Hadeel's responses, familiarity with the American culture seems to play an important factor in Saudi female students' decision to select the United States as their first option to complete their studies.

Participants' decision after experiencing the life in the United States. For Saudi female students' decision to study in the United States, the participants were asked a theoretical question "If you go back in time, would you make the same decision and come to the US to complete your studies? Why or why not?" This question helped explore whether Saudi female students were satisfied with their experiences in the United States and to what extent they were pleased with their decision. All six participants answered "Yes" for different reasons: (a) achieving personal growth; (b) significance of diversity and (c) language and academic development.

Achieving personal growth. The first reason, achieving personal growth, was highlighted by Nada who stated:

My personality changed 100%. I was spoiled in my country with my family. I did not have responsibilities. I was completely dependent. Here I became more independent. I had to learn to depend on myself and make my own decisions. It was a big challenge at the beginning, but as time passed by, I was able to overcome all the difficulties.

Back in Saudi Arabia, Nada used to live with her family who spoiled her and took care of everything for her. For Nada, therefore, transitioning from a collectivistic culture to an

individualistic culture was a big challenge because of the huge cultural differences in values and concepts between Saudi Arabia and the United States. From Nada's response, it can be clearly seen that she was not only able to overcome the challenges, but also achieve personal growth as she became more responsible and independent person.

Emphasizing personal growth as one of the main reasons for the participants to make the same decision and come to study in the United States if they go back in time, Hadeel mentioned:

I am satisfied with what I have accomplished here in the US and I am so proud. I discovered so many things about me, that I am patient, strong, and capable. I improved my English language skills. I got my master's degree. I am a PhD student right now. I have two beautiful children. I met good people. I made friends. I learned about other cultures. I feel more matured, stronger, more independent, and more confident. I feel so blessed. I just cannot ask for more.

In her response, Hadeel indicated living in the United States helped her discover so many things about herself (e.g. patient, strong, and capable). According to Hadeel, she has been always patient, strong, and capable, but living in Saudi Arabi did not give her the opportunity to discover all these characteristics in her personality as she was always dependent on her family before marriage, and on her husband after marriage. After experiencing the life in the United States, Hadeel mentioned she became more independent, stronger, more matured, and more confident.

Significance of diversity. Another reason was mentioned for making the same decision and study in the United States if the participant go back in time was the diversity of the United States. Amal stated:

The U.S. is a diverse country. You can meet people from different countries, different languages, and different cultures. Being in the U.S. is a great opportunity to learn about not just the American culture, but also about so many other cultures.

Highlighting the significance of diversity, Amal explained one of the great experiences she had while living and studying in the United States was learning about a variety of cultures as she had the opportunity to meet and communicate with people from all over the world who presented different countries, languages, and cultures.

Even for one of the participants who lived and studied in a less diverse area of the United States, she emphasized the importance of considering diversity when thinking about studying abroad. Highlighting the significant role of diversity in Saudi female's experiences in the United States, Noor stated the following,:

I would make the same decision and come to study in the United States, but I would choose a more diverse place. I feel that the place or the area you are in plays an important role. The more diverse the place is, the easier the life would be. In places where there is so much diversity, I feel way more comfortable than at the university I attend in the small town where most students are middle class white Americans. I also see a big difference when I travel to more diverse places such as New York, California, or Florida.

Noor further explained that in less diverse places in the United States, she felt that it was difficult for some people to understand her culture and accept her. The participant mentioned some close-minded and uneducated people do not understand other cultures and judge on people based on how they look. She added, "It is hard for them to accept you if you are different from them".

Noor pointed out if she goes back in time, she would make the same decision and come to study

in the United States, but she would choose a more diverse area in the United States such as California or Florida.

Language development and academic achievement. Five of the participants stated they would repeat the decision to study in the United States if they go back in time due to their satisfaction with their language development and academic achievement. Noor stated, “Being in the US allowed me to learn and improve my English. I am so close to get my bachelor’s degree. I can say that it was a good experience that I learned a lot from”. Hadeel also indicated, “I am satisfied with what I have accomplished here in the U.S. and I am so proud... I improved my English language skills. I got my master’s degree. I am a PhD student right now”. Similar to Noor’s and Hadeel’s comments, Amal, Sara, and Mona also expressed their satisfaction with their English language development and academic achievement by stating they enjoyed their academic experience in the United States and that they have learned a great deal from it.

Adaption to the American culture. Regarding their adjustment process, participants were asked whether it was difficult for them to adapt to the American culture. Three participants indicated it was not hard for them to adapt to the American culture due to their familiarity with it before coming to the United States. Hadeel stated that the following, “It was not difficult to adapt to the American culture as I was already familiar with it. I grew up watching Disney movies, American series, talk shows, and movies”. Nada also stated the following, “It was not hard to adjust to the American culture. Maybe because I read a lot about the American culture before I came to the U.S.. So, I had an idea about the American culture and people”. Similar to Hadeel’s and Nada’s responses, Mona indicated, “It was not hard at all to adapt to the American culture, especially for someone who was familiar with the American culture before coming to the U.S.”. From the above comments, familiarity with the American culture seems to make a

difference in Saudi female students' adaptation to the American culture as it made it easier and less frustrating for them.

Answering the same question of whether it was difficult to adapt to the American culture, two other participants mentioned it was hard to adjust to the American culture, but only at the beginning when they first arrived in the United States. Amal stated that:

It was hard to adapt to the American culture, but just at the beginning because I came from a very different culture and segregated society. However, I was able to adapt to the American culture with time, patience, and persistence.

Sara also mentioned when she first came to the United States, it was a little bit difficult to adapt to the American culture as it was completely different from her home culture. Both Amal and Sara pointed out that coming from a completely different culture made it difficult for them to adjust to the American culture, especially at the beginning of their arrival to the United States.

From discussing their adjustment process, Amal and Sara seemed to experienced culture chock during their first few months in the United States. Moving to a new country, people may need to adjust to new language, culture, values, and expectations and that adjustment can either go smoothly or cause conflict and confusion. Asking participants whether they felt they had to give up or adjust their culture or change their identity to fit in the American society: (a) four participants indicated they had to change and adjust their culture to fit into the American society; (b) one participant mentioned she did not have to change or adjust her culture, but she wanted to and (c) one participant explained she did not have to change, but she found herself unconsciously changing. In an explanation of the four levels of Berry's (1980) model of acculturation, Erwin, Asai, Durham, Halvorson, and Holte (2006) stated Berry's acculturation model includes the following:

(a) integrated individuals, wherein individuals want to maintain their identity with the home culture, but also want to take on some characteristics of the new culture, (b) assimilated individuals, wherein individuals do not want to keep their identity from their home culture but would rather take on all of the characteristics of the new culture, (c) separated individuals, wherein individuals want to separate themselves from the dominant culture. This level can be termed, segregation, if it is forced separation, and (d) marginalized individuals. In this level, individuals do not want to have anything to do with either the new culture or the old culture (p. 13).

One of the principles of Berry's (1980) acculturation model is *cultural maintenance* which refers to the extent to which a person is willing to maintain his/her original cultural identity; *integrated individuals*, *assimilated individuals*, *separated individuals*, or *marginalized individuals*.

For those who said they had to adjust their culture to fit into the American society, they explained that they had to change their hijab style, learn to interact with members of the opposite sex, adapt to the American way of life, and acquire new traditions. Noor stated the following, "I had to change my hijab style. In Saudi Arabia, I wear Abaya and niqab. In the US, I only wear a veil". Sara also explained, "I had to change my hijab style as in Saudi Arabia, I wear Abaya and niqab, whereas here I am only wearing hijab. Of course, I didn't give up my hijab, but I only modified it to fit into the American society". As Noor, Sara, Hadeel, and Nada wear black Abaya and Niqab back in Saudi Arabia, they felt they had to change their hijab style and wear only a veil with long sleeves and pants, so they do not look weird or strange to Americans. The participants explained while the veil is the typical type of hijab which is widely known around the world, black Abaya and Niqab may interfere with their communication and interactions with others as it represent the Saudi culture more than the Islamic one.

As Saudi female students come from a segregated culture, the four participants (Noor, Sara, Hadeel, and Nada) also indicated that they had to learn to communicate with members of the opposite sex in their adjustment process. According to Alhazmi (2013), transitioning from segregated society to mixed-gender environment presents numerous educational, social, and emotional challenges to Saudi female international students. Hadeel stated, “In the Saudi society, men and women interaction is very limited, so I had to learn to communicate with my male professors and classmates when I first came to the U.S.”. Sara also pointed out that the following, “Saudi society is a segregated society. The contact between men and women is very limited. Here I had to learn and get used to having male classmates and work with them”. From the participants’ responses, learning to interact with males is an important part of Saudi female students’ adaptation to the American culture. Although these participants had to learn to communicate with males, they only mention it as part of their adaption process and not as a challenge as Alhazmi (2013) stated.

Changing to a new way of life and acquiring new traditions were another two important adjustments that Saudi female students made in their process of adaptation to the American culture. Explaining how she changed her way of life, Noor stated,

I also had to adjust my life style and way of life. In Saudi Arabia, I was dependent on my family as I lived with them. I lived in a group where all of us were connected to each other and care about each other. Now in the US and I am living alone, I learned how to be independent and responsible. I had to take care of everything including studying, shopping, paying pills, etc. I feel more mature and stronger.

Living away from her family for her first time, Noor had to learn to completely depend on herself and be responsible. Hadeel who lives and studies in the United States with her husband and two children, on the other hand, had to acquire new traditions as she explained:

I also had to learn cultural norms and values. In Saudi Arabia, we don't celebrate Halloween, Thanksgiving, or Christmas. Here in the U.S. and having a 5-year-old son who has been in the U.S. since he was 7 months and who attends an American school, I had to be flexible and let my son enjoy these cultural holidays. As a Muslim family in the U.S., we enjoy these holidays from the cultural perspective, and not from the religious one. We also celebrate our religious holidays with the Muslim community here.

While Hadeel and her family participate in cultural traditions in the United States from the cultural perspective, they still celebrate their religious holidays with the Muslim community in the United States. According to Berry's (1980) model of acculturation, the four participants who indicated that they had to change and adjust their culture to fit into the American society are *Integrated Individuals* because as these Saudi female students changed their hijab style, learned to interact with members of the opposite sex, adapted to the American way of life, and acquired new traditions to fit into the American culture, they still wanted to maintain their identity with their home culture. Although these Saudi females changed their hijab from wearing black abaya and niqab to wearing a veil and long sleeves and pants, they did not completely give up their hijab but only modified it to become more accepted in the American society. While Hadeel stated her family and she celebrate holidays in the United States from the cultural perspectives and not from the religious one, they still celebrate their religious holidays with the Muslim community.

For the one participant who mentioned that she did not have to change or adjust her culture, but she wanted to, she seemed to be a more of an *Assimilated Individual*. According to Erwin, Asai, Durham, Halvorson, and Holte (2006), “Assimilated individuals, wherein individuals do not want to keep their identity from their home culture but would rather take on all of the characteristics of the new culture” (p.13). When Mona was asked whether she felt that she had to give up or adjust her culture or change her identity to fit in the American society, she said:

I didn't have to adjust my culture or style, but I wanted to. I wanted to live the American life and enjoy the experience. That's why I was more flexible in myself and my style and I was not afraid of trying new things. I believe that helped me adapt quickly to the American life and culture. For me, changing or adjusting my culture was a choice not a must.

For Mona who does not wear hijab, changing was not something that she had to do to fit into the American culture, but she wanted to do. Mona further explained she was flexible and willing to change because she wanted to live and enjoy the experience and try the American way of life. The participant also believed her flexibility and willingness to change helped her a lot in her process of adaptation to the American culture.

Answering the same question of “Did you feel that you had to give up or adjust your culture or change your identity to fit in the American society?”, one of the participants stated that she did not have to change, but she found herself unconsciously changing. Amal mentioned that:

I did not have to change, but with time and the way of life here in the U.S., I found myself unconsciously changing. I became more Americanized in my life style. I only care about my studies, my work, my time with my immediate family, and my gym. I

became more open to other cultures. I have more contact with males. I became more independent. At the beginning I had an internal conflict with myself. I was lost, and I did not know what to do. I needed support. Then I tried to understand the American culture by watching American TV, talk shows, news, and movies.

For Amal changing was not a decision she made. Instead, with time and engaging in the American way of life, she found herself unconsciously changing. Amal further described herself as *Americanized* as she became more adapted to an American life style. The participant explained she only cares about her studies, her work, her time with her immediate family, and her gym, which sounds very American. Her personality has also changed as she became more open to other cultures and more independent. From Amal's description of what happened to her when she first came to the United States, however, it seems that she has experienced a culture shock and has gone through a real conflict. According to The Culture Shock Theory, as people spend some more time in the new culture, they may start feeling confused, isolated, and in need for family and friends, and experience what is called *the disintegration stage*. For Amal, she indicated that she had a conflict, she was lost, she did not know what to do, and she needed support as she found herself in the middle of two completely different cultures. When she was asked about how she dealt with that conflict, she said that she tried to understand the American culture by watching American TV, talk shows, news, movies. According to Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006), during their transition experience, adults need to use coping resources to assist them in their adjustment process including situation, self, support, and strategies. For Amal, she used *self* as she only counted on herself in her process of adaptation to the American culture and tried to understand the American culture by watching American TV, talk shows, news, movies.

Social challenges. Interviewing six Saudi female students who live and study in different parts of the United States and come from different backgrounds, all of them indicated they had either no or limited friendships with Americans. Describing the challenge of making friends in the United States, Noor stated that:

There are also social challenges including making friends and get acceptance in the American society and those kinds of challenges are very hard to overcome unless you change yourself and become more Americanized or move to a more diverse place where there are people from different backgrounds. For me, the place was a big problem as most of the people here are middle class white Americans. Pursuing their bachelor's degree, those students seem to be young and immature. They judge me based on my hijab and how I look, and it is hard for them to accept people who are different from them.

Noor mentioned *being different* as she wore hijab was one of the things that hindered her interactions with Americans. The participant indicated it was hard for young and immature students to accept others who were different from them. She further said the only way to make friends in the United States was to change and become more Americanized or move to a more diverse area. Noor believed the place played a role in her interactions with Americans. She thought she would have more American friends if she moved to a more diverse place in the United States. Noor explained the following,

My friendships with Americans are very limited. They are actually limited to tutors and social programs that are designed to help international students. I don't have that kind of spontaneous and casual friendships except with one of my classmates. She grew up in an

educated family who were open to other cultures. I have been in the U.S. for 5 years and I have only one normal true friendship.

Although Noor has been in the United States for 5 years, she had only one *normal* and *true* friendship. The participant believed the educated and open-minded family and the environment her friend grew up in was one of the main factors which contributed to establishing that friendship.

Other participants indicated their friendships with Americans were limited to classmates and tutors. Hadeel pointed out the following, “Most of my friendships with Americans are limited to my classmates, tutors, and people in programs designed for helping international students”. Sara also mentioned, “Honestly, I do not have contact with Americans. Maybe in the classroom, but no deep relationships”. Similar to Hadeel’s and Sara’s responses, Nada stated, “To be honest, I don’t have American friends. Maybe just in school with my classmates”. For other participants, even though they had limited friendships with Americans, they mentioned that they had good relationships with Americans in general. Amal indicated,

My friendships with Americans are limited to my work and academic life. But although I don’t have deep relationships with Americans, it is still good relationships in general. To describe it, I can say that it is just greetings and quick talks with the parents of my children’s friends and people in the gym.

In the same vein, Mona mentioned the following, “I do not have friendships with Americans. Most of my friends are Arabs and Saudis. I have good relationships with my American classmates though, but as classmates, not as friends”. When the six participants were asked about the reason of having no or limited friendships with Americans, they highlighted the

effect of their English language skills and the influence of their hijab and Muslim identity on their interactions with Americans. These two factors are discussed below.

Language challenges. English language skills seemed to play a role in Saudi female students interactions with Americans as most of the participants stated that their English skills negatively influenced their opportunities to interact with Americans. Highlighting the challenge of language barrier, Noor stated,

Language was another challenge especially at the beginning as my English was not that good. My English language greatly affected my opportunities to interact with Americans as it was poor, and I couldn't express myself clearly. I tried to improve my language by studying hard in the English language center and taking advantage of tutoring services. I also tried to read books, listen to the radio and music, and watch American series and movies.

Hadeel also explained,

My English language skills affected my interaction with Americans at the beginning. It was hard for me to understand native speakers' accent, their fast speech rate, and the cultural elements of speaking and communication. However, as my language improved, that was not an issue any more. I tried very hard to improve my English by practicing my reading, listening, and speaking. I attended ESL classes. I used tutoring services. I tried to attend and participate in social and cultural events.

For Noor and Hadeel, language was one of the challenges they faced, but only at the beginning. As their English language was *poor* and *not that good*, it greatly affected their opportunities to interact with Americans. They both had difficulties expressing themselves clearly and understanding native speakers. What they did later was that they tried to improve their English

skills by going to ESL classes and tutoring sessions, practicing their listening, speaking and reading skills, and attending and participating in social and cultural events.

Trying to overcome the language barrier challenge, Amal also added,

My English skills strongly affected my interaction with Americans. When I talk with them, even now when my English skills are very good, I think about what I want to say, and I worry about my grammar and if am being clear and understood, especially if I am talking to people for the first time because I want to leave a good impression. I try not to think too much about what I am saying and not to worry too much about my grammar.

Now, I became more willing to take risks and practice my English.

Even after Amal's English language improved, she still think about what she wants to say when she speaks to Americans. She is also afraid of making mistakes and leaving bad impression. For Amal, it seems personality plays a role in her interaction with Americans. Amal stated, after she realized her problem, she became more willing to take risks, make mistakes, and practice her English without worrying too much about her grammar. Nada and Mona mentioned they could not change their personality. Nada specifically stated,

I don't think my language skills affected my interactions with Americans as much as my personality did. I believe my personality greatly affected my interactions with Americans because I am too shy. I am afraid to start a conversation with people. I honestly couldn't change my personality. I focused more on my studies and academic progress instead.

Mona added that the following,

My English skills greatly affected my relationships with Americans. In school, I don't face any language difficulties as it is academic language and all the terms are related to my major which I am familiar with. But when I tried to use Meet-up website and go out

with Americans, it was so hard for me to keep up with them. They spoke so fast and there were so many terms I did not understand. I was embarrassed, and I felt like an outsider. Even though I am very Americanized in my style, I could not overcome the language barrier. I think a big part of it because of my personality. In Saudi Arabia, I am smart and very social. So, I can't accept being less than that because of the language. That's why I avoid friendships with Americans. I don't want to look less intelligent than I really am because of the language.

For Mona, her language skills greatly influenced her interactions with Americans, but she also thought that her personality played a role. When she tried to go out with Americans, she faced difficulties keeping up with them because of the language and cultural gap. As a result, she was embarrassed and felt like an outsider because of her personality. Mona explained her American style did not help her overcome the language and culture barrier. She also said that she was smart and very social person in Saudi Arabia, and just could not accept looking less intelligent because of the language.

The role of hijab and Muslim identify. Another factor contributed to Saudi female students' limited interactions with Americans was their hijab and Muslim identity. As all Saudi female students were Muslims, they were asked whether their Saudi or Muslim identity influenced their opportunities to interact with Americans. Two participants indicated their hijab and Muslim identity negatively affected their interactions with Americans. Hadeel stated that the following:

My hijab and Muslim identity affected my interaction with Americans. For many Americans, hijab creates a barrier that it is kind of something mysterious that they are

afraid to discover. They think I am different because of my hijab and they don't know how to communicate with me, so they prefer to avoid me instead.

For Hadeel, she felt her hijab created a barrier between her and Americans. The participant also believed Americans think she is different because of her hijab and, therefore, avoid her. She further explained keeping her hijab and maintaining her Muslim identity was one of the difficult challenges she faced in the United States, especially with racist and uneducated people, and with all the stereotypes surrounding Muslim women. Similar to Hadeel's view, Sara mentioned one of the biggest things that hindered her communication with Americans was her hijab as she thought that cultural differences can create a barrier between people. When Hadeel and Sara were asked how they deal with that challenge, Hadeel stated that:

What I usually try to do is to be myself and show them who I am by smiling, greeting, and being a simple person. I attend and participate in social and cultural events and present my culture, so they have a chance to learn about it.

Sara, on the other hand, explained what she always try to do was to ignore racist people and focus on her relationships with good people.

Another two participants stated their hijab and Muslim identity negatively influenced their interactions with Americans, but only in less diverse places. Noor indicated the following,

My Muslim identity and my hijab influenced my opportunities to interact with Americans. I feel that there is a barrier between me and the American people because of my hijab as it is hard for them to accept me with it... I also feel that the place or the area you are in plays an important role. The more diverse the place is, the easier the life would be. In places where there is so much diversity, I feel way more comfortable... I also see a

big difference when I travel to more diverse places such as New York, California, or Florida.

Noor stated the hijab created a barrier between Americans and her. She also believed that the place played an important role as she noticed a big difference in her interactions with Americans when she was in more diverse places such as New York, California, and Florida as she felt more accepted and welcomed. In the same vein, Nada mentioned that the following,

In the area I am living now, I feel that my hijab affected my interactions with Americans because people here are not very open to other cultures. When I was in Seattle, however, it was a more diverse city where you can see people from diverse cultural backgrounds. I didn't feel like a foreigner or an outsider there.

Answering the same question of whether the Muslim identity affected opportunities to interact with Americans, one of the participants mentioned the influence of her hijab and Muslim identity on her communication with Americans highly depended on whom she interacted with. Amal explained,

It depends on who I am interacting with. Educated and open-minded people won't care if I am a Muslim or not, if am wearing hijab or not. Racist, close-minded, and uneducated people certainly do. I just try to avoid them and focus on good people.

Two participants also pointed out that hijab and Muslim identity can create a barrier between Muslim students and Americans and that they both have experienced a big difference in their interactions with Americans when they were not wearing hijab. Noor indicated that the following,

I feel that if I am not wearing hijab, they would accept me. Sometimes in winter, I wear a hoodie without hijab when I go to the grocery or when I am in a hurry. Without hijab people treat me so much better. They treat me normally just like other Americans.

In her interactions with Americans, Noor noticed a big difference when she only wore a hoodie. Without hijab, Noor said most people treated her so much better. Mona mentioned when she was wearing hijab, she faced racism, while other people just avoided her. After she took off her hijab and became more Americanized in her style, she was shocked how people became so much friendly with her.

Academic challenges. Educational difficulties seemed to be one of the challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States. As the educational system in Saudi Arabia differs from the one in the United States, Saudi female students encounter difficulties adjusting to the new teaching and learning methods. Noor, Sara, Amal, and Hadeel mentioned academic difficulties as one of the challenges they face in the United States. Noor stated the following,

There are also academic challenges as the learning and teaching methods in the US are different from the ones in my country. In Saudi Arabia, my role as a student is to listen, take notes, and prepare for exams. In the U.S., on the other hand, I have to participate, do projects, and make presentations. At the beginning it was difficult, but it became easier and less frustrating with time and practice.

For Noor, it was difficult for her to adjust to the teaching and learning methods in the United States as they were completely different from the ones she used to in Saudi Arabia. The participant also mentioned adapting to her new role as a student was challenging as well. While students in Saudi Arabia only listen to the teacher, take notes, and prepare for exams, they are

expected to do much more in the United States and be active participants, make presentations, and do projects. With time and practice, however, Noor was able to overcome that challenge. Besides the different teaching and learning style, language seemed to present another challenge in education. Amal explained the following,

For the academic challenges, my hardest time was during my master's level as everything was different from the way we learned in Saudi Arabia, the teaching and learning methods, teacher's and students' roles in the classroom. The language was a huge barrier too at the beginning, for example I would need double or triple the time that an American student needs to read or write articles or prepare presentations. I spent so much time on studying, reading, and working on assignments. I also worked very hard to improve my English.

For Amal, her English language skills made her spent much longer time on studying and working than a typical American student would need. Language proficiency played a significant role in academic success, and therefore, Amal worked very hard to improve her language skills.

Explaining her academic challenges, Hadeel added,

Starting my master's classes was also so difficult as the teaching and learning methods was very different from the ones in my home country. In the ESL classes, my instructors used to explain everything to us and give us the time we need to practice because they know we are international students. They also used to adjust their speech so that we can understand them easily. Unlike the English language program, most of my classmates in the master's level were Americans. They spoke too fast, with so many abbreviations. With time and practice, however, I was able to overcome these challenges. I cried a lot at the beginning. I was about to give up. I had to believe in myself, however. I had to

remind myself of my goal and why I came to the US in the first place. That's why I worked very hard to improve my English.

For Hadeel, transitioning from ESL classes where most of her classmates were international students to graduate courses where most of her classmates were Americans was a big challenge. As the instructors in the ESL classes made special adjustments on their speech and teaching style to accommodate international students' needs, Hadeel was shocked when she moved to graduate courses as she was treated like other Americans. For her, it was difficult to understand Americans because "they spoke too fast" and "with so many abbreviations". As Hadeel faced all these challenges, she mentioned that she was very frustrated and about to give up. The participant was able to improve her language and overcome all the challenges, however, when she believed in herself and kept reminding herself of her goal and why she came to the United States.

Familial challenges. One of the difficulties Saudi female students encounter in the United States is familial challenges. Five participants indicated making a balance between family duties and academic responsibilities was a real struggle. For Hadeel, Amal, and Sara, being away from family made balancing responsibilities between family and school even harder. Hadeel stated the following,

Pursuing a higher degree and having children at the same time was also one of the big challenges. It is hard sometimes to make a balance between family duties and responsibilities and academic life, especially that I am away from my family and I don't have any one to help me with my children.

Further, Amal mentioned,

Being a student and a mother at the same time is one of the most difficult challenges.

Back home, my family helped me with my kids when I needed someone to take care of them. Here I am all by myself.

Sara also added the following,

One of the most challenging difficulties is being a mother and a student, especially when I am away from family which makes it very hard. In mornings, my kids go to school, but during my evening classes, I have to find someone to take care of my children. If my family were with me, they would help me with my kids when I am in school or when I need some time to study and work.

Another factor that made being a mother and a student a real challenge, as one of the participants mentioned, was her responsibilities as a mother in the Saudi life style which was different from the American one. Explaining her struggle, Hadeel mentioned,

Unlike most American families who eat outside, Saudi women cook for their families and children on a daily basis. In Saudi Arabia, one of women's responsibilities is to cook for their families. Instead of focusing only on my academic work, I have to cook for my family, help my children with their school work, teach them Arabic since their first language is English, and spend some time with my husband and children. All these responsibilities prevent me from spending more time in the library, for example, or engaging in the academic and social events.

For Hadeel, her role and responsibilities as a mother made her sacrifice her academic and social life for her family. The participant indicated instead of socializing and attending and participating in academic and social events, she spent most of her time with her family. Mona also included, "I work only when my kids are at school. When they come back from school, I

spend the rest of my time with them”. Besides helping her children with their school work, Hadeel also had to teach them Arabic because of their lack of Arabic proficiency. Nada also mentioned she had to teach her son Arabic since he went to English school and spoke only English. Therefore, their children’s Arabic proficiency was another worry for Saudi mothers in the United States.

Exploring how Saudi female students managed to balance responsibilities and cope with such a challenge, the participants highlighted the benefits of time management, sharing responsibilities, and daycare services. In her comment, Hadeel mentioned her husband and she worked together, shared responsibilities, and used daycare services when they were both busy with school work. The participant stated,

What my husband and I usually do is to share responsibilities and help each other. He would take care of the kids when I am busy, and I would do the same when he has work to do. If we both have classes or work at the same time, daycare services would be our solution.

Amal also highlighted the great help daycares offer by stating the following, “Thank God there is something called ‘daycares’. My kids spend most of their time in school and daycare, so I can finish my work”.

Emphasizing the importance of time management, Nada pointed out that:

With time, I had to learn how to manage my time and specify some time for my academic work and some time for my family. I learned to make a weekly “to-do tasks” to help me manage my time and become more organized in my academic life and my life with my family. I also took advantage of daycare services when both my husband and I were busy with our academic work.

Time management seemed also to help Mona as she indicated, “I usually organize my time and make a schedule for myself to help me make a balance between my work and my kids”.

Vision 2030. In April of 2016, the crown prince Mohammed bin Salman created a vision called 2030. Some of the main goals of this plan were to boost the country’s economy, develop the educational curriculum, and empower the role of women and provide them with equal job opportunities. For the first time, Saudi women were allowed and, most importantly, trusted to fill leadership positions. For example, on February the 23rd of 2019, princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud became the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States and the first Saudi female envoy in the country’s history. After years of protests and claims, Saudi women have finally gained their right to drive on September the 26th of 2017. After being known as the world’s most conservative country, Saudi Arabia is now witnessing a great revolution and empowerment of the role of Saudi women in various fields than ever before. Some of the examples of the recent changes that Saudi Arabia experienced during the last 2 years; women were allowed to drive, offered equal job opportunities, and filled leadership positions, the ban on cinemas was lifted, public concerts were permitted, men and women were able to sit together to watch and enjoy music concerts and sport events, and music programs were offered for the first time in some universities in Saudi Arabia (CNN NEWS, 2018).

As the present study was conducted after the historical changes that Saudi Arabia witnessed during the last 2 years, it was important to ask Saudi female students whether they felt that vision 2030 and the recent changes that Saudi Arabia experienced would change their experiences in the United States or change the way they perceive themselves. All six participants emphasized the positive influence of vision 2030 as they became stronger, more confident, and

more independent. Noor mentioned Vision 2030 would change the way she perceives herself and people in the United States perceive her. She stated,

Empowering the women's role in the Saudi society would positively influence our lives as Saudi women and make our lives easier. It would definitely change the way I perceive myself and how people in the US perceive me. People in the US always talk about Saudi women as abused women who are deprived from their own rights. They always ask me about the reason why women cannot drive in Saudi Arabia, for example. Some of them even thought that I have been forced to wear hijab. Now, with all the positive changes in Saudi Arabia and especially in women's role, I feel more confident.

Similar to Noor's comment, Hadeel also mentioned she received so many questions about women in Saudi Arabia since she came to the United States. Hadeel indicated,

Vision 2030 gives me more confidence. Since I came to the US, I received so many questions from American people about women in Saudi Arabia. They picture Saudi women as second-class-citizens who are deprived from their own rights. They always ask me about our job opportunities and our right to drive. With the Vision 2030 that empowers the role of Saudi women, offers them equal job opportunities, and gives them their right to drive, I no longer have to face these kinds of questions and justify my society or myself.

Some of the positive aspects and effects of Vision 2030 and the recent changes that took place in Saudi Arabia that came up and were repeatedly mentioned by the participants were; empowerment of Saudi women, gaining more freedom, receiving equal job opportunities, becoming stronger, more confident, and more independent, and excited to work hard and go back to Saudi Arabia. Hadeel mentioned,

Now that 2030 also opens so many job opportunities and leadership positions for Saudi women, I can enjoy my learning experience here in the US without worrying too much about job opportunities when I come back home. I believe that 2030 makes us stronger, more confident, and more independent.

Amal further added that:

2030 gives me a big support and makes my life easier. The 2030 vision encourages us as women to be strong and independent, achieve what we want, and be successful. It makes me more confident. It provides equal job opportunities and leadership positions for both men and women. That actually pushed me stronger to study, achieve my goals, and be successful.

Highlighting how Vision 2030 made them less worried about job opportunities and more excited to study and work hard and go back to Saudi Arabia, Mona stated the following,

For me, all these changes and the empowerment of women's role in the country make me more excited to work hard and go back home. Saudi women now have more freedom and more opportunities than ever before and that makes me more confident and more excited to go back to my country after graduation.

Nada also pointed out that the following,

Now I am studying in the U.S. with more confidence that I will go back home and find more job opportunities. I recently joined a group of Saudi girls and boys in Saudi Arabia who are interested in statistics on the internet. It seems that they are getting along very well, they set up meetings, share interests, knowledge, and experiences, and they help each other. We did not have that kind of opportunity before vision 2030. I believe vision

2030 opened so many doors to Saudi women and gave them more freedom and confidence.

For other participants, they believed the effect of Vision 2030 and the changes Saudi Arabia witnessed during the last 2 years on the experience of Saudi female students in the United States would be even greater for those who will be coming to study in the United States in the next few years. For those who came from a completely segregated society where women could not drive and be responsible for themselves, transitioning to an open and free society in the United States presented a real challenge. For those who will be coming to study in the United States after the recent changes that Saudi Arabia experienced and after gaining more freedom in the Saudi society, their transition to the United States would be less challenging. Emphasizing this idea, Sara mentioned that:

I feel that with Vision 2030, Saudi Arabi is becoming more open society. Saudi women became more powerful and more independent. They have more freedom and more job opportunities. They have more power and became more equal to men. For me and for Saudi female students who are already in the U.S., the recent changes in Saudi Arabia may have a positive psychological influence on us and positively change the way we perceive ourselves. For those who will be coming to the US.. eventually after the recent changes, I believe they would have an easier and smoother experience since they already have more freedom in Saudi Arabia, already became more independent and can drive their own cars, and already have more job opportunities.

Life experience in the United States. Answering the question of whether they enjoyed their life experience in the United States, all six participants replayed “yes” for different reasons such as life was easier in the United States, they enjoyed more freedom, they learned about other

cultures, and they had an opportunity to grow and shape their personality. Emphasizing that life in the United States was easier than in Saudi Arabia and how they enjoyed more freedom, Noor mentioned,

I enjoy my life and learning experience in the U.S. as I feel that life is easier here than in Saudi Arabia. In the U.S. I have more freedom. I get to choose what to do and make my own decisions without any pressure from my family.

Mona further included,

Life in the U.S. is so simple and easy. There are so many options when it comes to products and services. Day cares made my life so much easier as am a parent and a student at the same time. I like the freedom the people are enjoying here. Unlike in Saudi Arabia, people here can do whatever they want without being judged.

Another reason that made the participants enjoy their life experience in the United States was the diversity of the United States and having the opportunity to learn about other cultures.

Sara stated that:

The U.S. is a diverse country with so many people from different countries and cultures. I had a great opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds and learn about other cultures. I also feel that we are accepted here as Arabs and Muslims.

For Nada, living in the United States gave her an opportunity to learn not only about people from different countries, but also about people from different regions in Saudi Arabia. In her comment, Nada mentioned the following,

I observed different cultures of people not only outside Saudi Arabia, but even from Saudi Arabia itself. I met people from different regions in Saudi Arabia who had

different dialects, different style, and different traditions. Although we were from the same country and shared some similarities, we discovered some differences.

Having the opportunity to grow and develop their personality was one of the factors which contributed to the participants' satisfaction with their life experience in the United States.

Hadeel stated,

I'm enjoying my life here in the US as I learned so many things. I had an opportunity to learn a lot about other cultures. I became more flexible, more open to other cultures, more independent, stronger, more confident, and more responsible.

Amal also added,

Life in the U.S. is very different from life in my country. I had great experiences in the U.S. that helped me learn, grow, and build my personality. I enjoyed my academic experience as I played an active role in my learning experience. I learned how to participate, speak up, stand for my beliefs, and share my opinions.

When the participants were asked whether their social and academic experiences met their expectations, all of them said "yes", except two. For those who said that their social and academic experiences met their expectations, they stated that they faced some challenges in the beginning, but were able to overcome all the difficulties with time and patience. The participants also mentioned they have improved their English, they had a good academic experience, they have achieved their goals, they have learned about other cultures, they have met new people and made friends, and they have developed their personality. Hadeel stated the following,

I expected to have challenges at the beginning, but I was able to overcome all difficulties and barriers. I improved my English language skills. I got my master's degree. I am a

PhD student right now. I met good people. I made friends. I learned about other cultures. I feel more matured, stronger, more independent, and more confident.

Amal further added,

My academic experience was very good. I improved my English. My grades were very good. I am a PhD student now just as I wished. Socially speaking, I met people from different countries and backgrounds. I learned about other cultures. I can communicate effectively with people who are different from me. Personally, I became stronger, wiser, and more independent.

For Nada, she has gone through a tragedy as she lost her daughter while she was in the United States. Her story and how she coped with that tragedy was remarkable. In her comment, Nada gave a great example of the strong Saudi woman by stating,

I came to the US with a goal that I want to get my master's degree and now I am about to graduate. I faced so many challenges at the beginning. I lost my daughter and that was a big shock for me. I was about to give up, but I found myself turning challenges to motives, and obstacles to volition and determination.

For Noor and Mona, on the other hand, their social and academic experiences did not meet their expectations for different reasons. Noor pointed out that the following,

I believe it would have been even better if I were in a more diverse university. People here including professors and students don't understand other cultures. They don't know the challenges we face as international students both academically and socially. They don't understand how our language skills and the American teaching and learning methods affect our learning experience. They don't know how much effort we put into

academic work and social life. They don't know how hard it is to be away from family and friends and being socially rejected at the same time.

In almost all of Noor's comments, she repeatedly emphasized the significance of diversity. To her, being in a less diverse place greatly affected her experience in the United States. The participant believed she would have a better experience if she was in a more diverse university. Mona also mentioned her academic and social experiences were nothing like she pictured before coming to the United States. Mona stated,

My social and academic experiences didn't meet my expectations. For the academic experience, I expected more resources, bigger labs, bigger projects, and more support. But in the school I am attending, I didn't find what I expected. All my success was based on my past studies at one of the Saudi universities. During my bachelor's studies in a Saudi university, I had more resources, bigger labs, and bigger projects. For the social experience, I expected to have more friendships with Americans, but I believe that my language skills hindered my relationships with Americans.

For Mona's academic experience, she expected to have "more resources, bigger labs, bigger projects, and more support", but that was not the case in the university she attended. The participant added that her social life was nothing like she thought it would be as she did not have American friends because of her language skills.

The participants were also asked what does a Saudi female student need to have a good experience in the United States from their own opinion. There were a number of interesting advices that were offered and highlighted. In her response, Noor emphasized the importance of considering diversity when selecting the university you plan to attend. She mentioned that:

To have a good experience in the US, it is very important to choose the area and the university you want to attend. You need to make sure that it is a diverse university with a high percentage of international students and people from different backgrounds. That would make your social and academic experience much easier and pleasant.

Flexibility, being open to other cultures, living the experience, and trying the American way of life were other important advices emphasized by participants. Amal stated,

The Saudi girl needs to free herself from everything that could push her back. She needs to try to live the experience and life in the U.S. and enjoy it. She needs to forget about the way of life in Saudi Arabia and try the American way of life. She needs to take advantage of this great opportunity and wonderful experience as it is temporary, and she will eventually go back home.

Noor also added,

It is also important to be flexible in your style and way of life and be open to other cultures. Try to live the American way of life, try new food and new adventures, get to know people from different backgrounds, live the experience, and enjoy the life.

The importance of flexibility and confidence was also mentioned by Hadeel and Mona. Hadeel indicated that the following, “She.. a Saudi female student.. needs to be flexible and open to other cultures. She needs to have confidence and not afraid of trying new things”. Mona also pointed out, “A Saudi female student needs to believe in herself and be confident. She also needs to free herself from anything that pushes her back”.

Other highlighted advices by participants were *working hard* and *managing time and responsibilities*. Hadeel stated the following,

Saudi female students need to work hard especially with language practice, take advantage of volunteering opportunities, attend and participate in social and cultural events. If they are mothers, then they need to make a balance between family responsibilities and academic life.

Nada further added, “A Saudi female student needs to have ambition, determination, and persistence. She needs to set a goal for herself, manage her time, face all the challenges, and work hard to achieve her dreams”.

Unlike all previous advices which focused only on Saudi female students’ role and what they need to do to have a good experience in the United States, Sara’s response highlighted the significant roles of Saudi female students, American professors and students, English language centers, offices for international students, and student services, and how they all greatly contribute to Saudi female students’ experiences in the United States. Sara stated,

I think a Saudi female student needs to be prepared for this new experience and transition. She needs more awareness of the US culture before coming to the US.. in the English classes for example. She needs more awareness, preamble, and guidance. I think Americans also need to be aware of other cultures. They need to develop more acceptance, tolerance, respect, and appreciation of other cultures. American professors and students need to understand the challenges that international students encounter, so they can understand their situation. English language centers, offices for international students, and student services need to maximize their help and support too.

Summary and Discussion of Major Findings

The main purpose of the second phase of the study was to investigate in depth the acculturation challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States, how they

cope with their acculturation challenges, and whether the historical changes the country of Saudi Arabia experienced during the last 2 years have any influence on their experience. This section will summarize and discuss the qualitative interview findings in relation to the first, third, and fourth research questions, connect the findings with existing literature, and explain how the findings fit into the theoretical framework used in this study: The Cultural Dimension Theory (Hofstede, 2001); The Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1983) and The Culture Shock Theory (Oberg, 1960).

Analyzing the interview data, nine primary themes emerged in relation to Saudi female students' experiences in the United States and the acculturation challenges they encounter. The nine main themes that were identified were as follows: (a) Making the decision to study in the United States; (b) Adaptation to the American culture; (c) Social challenges; (d) Language challenges; (e) The role of hijab and Muslim identity; (f) Academic challenges; (g) Familial challenges; (h) Vision 2030 and (i) Life experience in the United States.

Discussing Saudi female students' decision to study in the United States when they were in Saudi Arabia and before experiencing the life in the United States, the participants highlighted three main factors that contributed to their decision: (a) Having a family member in the United States; (b) The value of obtaining a degree from an American university and (c) Familiarity with the American culture. As those female students came from a collectivistic culture and were strongly connected to their families, their decision to choose the United States to complete their studies was because one of their family members was studying there. According to The Cultural Dimension Theory, members of collectivistic cultures are more culturally independent, connected, and cooperated (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Exploring the perceptions of Saudi women on their experiences in the United States, Macias (2016) also found that family played an

important role in Saudi women's lives. Another factor that contributed to Saudi female students' decision to study in the United States was the value of obtaining a degree from an American university and how it is appreciated in the Saudi job market. As the participants indicated, having a degree from an American university would not only help students find jobs, but also help those who are already employed in their career advancement. Another reason for selecting Saudi female students the United States as their first option to complete their studies was because of their familiarity with the American culture.

Even after experiencing the life in the United States, the participants stated that if they go back in time, they would still make the same decision and come to study in the United States for different reasons: (a) Achieving personal growth; (b) Significance of diversity and (c) Language and academic development. Most participants indicated that moving from Saudi Arabia to the United States was a big challenge for them, especially in the beginning because of the huge cultural differences in values and concepts between the two cultures. According to Hofstede and Bond (1984), while members of the individualistic cultures such as the United States are supposed to take care of only themselves and their immediate families, people of the collectivistic cultures such as Saudi Arabia expect their relatives or members of their group to look after them in exchange for loyalty. Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) stated international students who experience transition may either grow or fail as a result of that transition and its consequences. For most participants, experiencing life in the United States helped them become stronger, more independent, more responsible, and more confident. Achieving personal growth goes in line with the findings of Davis's (2014), Macias's (2016), and Arafeh's (2017) studies as Saudi women who participated in their research also reported increased self-confidence, independence, and intellectual growth after experiencing the life in the

United States. The significant role of diversity on Saudi female students' experiences in the United States was also emphasized by the participants. According to the participants, being in a diverse country such as the United States helped them learn about other cultures as they had the opportunity to meet and communicate with people from all over the world who presented different countries, languages, and cultures. They also stated, "The more diverse the place is, the easier the life would be". Davis (2014) pointed out the place played an important role in Saudi women's adjustment experience. The author stated that unlike those who were in a less diverse area, Saudi women who were in a more diverse place such as California did not experience discrimination. Another factor highlighted by participants was language development and academic achievement. Most participants expressed their satisfaction with their English language development and academic achievement by stating that they have enjoyed their academic experience in the United States and that they have learned a great deal from it.

The second theme identified from the data analysis was Saudi female students' adaptation to the American culture. Familiarity with the American culture before coming to the United States made it easier and less frustrating for some of the participants to adapt to the American culture. Exploring the cultural adjustment experience of Saudi women in the United States, Davis (2014) mentioned having enough information about the American culture before coming to the United States helped reduce Saudi women's culture shock and facilitate their adjustment process. Other participants, on the other hand, indicated it was difficult for them, especially in the beginning, to adapt to the American culture due to the huge cultural differences between Saudi Arabia and the United States. According to Valdes (1986), the acculturation process of international students is highly influenced by the degrees of differences and similarities between their home culture and the new culture. Berry (1980) also stated the home culture plays a

significant role in the acculturation and adjustment process of international students. For some participants, they experienced culture shock during their first few months in the United States. According to Pedersen (1995), spending some time in the new culture, people may start feeling confused, isolated, and in need for family and friends, and experience what is called *the disintegration stage* of culture shock. As those students moved to a new country, they needed to adapt to new language, culture, values, and expectations. While that adjustment went smoothly for some participants, it caused conflict for the others. When the participants were asked whether they felt that they had to give up or adjust their culture or change their identity to fit into the American society: (a) four participants indicated they had to change and adjust their culture to fit into the American society as they had to change their hijab style, learn to interact with members of the opposite sex, adapt to the American way of life, and acquire new traditions; (b) one participant mentioned she did not have to change or adjust her culture, but she wanted to as she was excited to live and enjoy the experience and try the American way of life without maintaining any part of her home culture and identity and (c) one participant explained she did not have to change, but she found herself unconsciously changing and becoming more Americanized with time and engaging in the American way of life. Those diverse responses go in line with Berry's (1980) acculturation model. According to Erwin, Asai, Durham, Halvorson, and Holte (2006), one of the principles of Berry's (1980) acculturation model is *cultural maintenance* which refers to the extent to which a person is willing to maintain his or her original cultural identity; *integrated individuals* who "want to maintain their identity with the home culture, but also want to take on some characteristics of the new culture", *assimilated individuals* who "do not want to keep their identity from their home culture but would rather take on all of the characteristics of the new culture", *separated individuals* who "want to separate

themselves from the dominant culture”, or *marginalized individuals* who “do not want to have anything to do with either the new culture or the old culture” (p.13).

In exploring the third theme, social challenges were discussed and highlighted by the participants. All Saudi female students who participated in this study indicated that they had either no or limited friendships with Americans. In their studies, Al Remeih (2017) and Davis (2014) pointed out most Saudi women who live and study in the United States described their friendships with Americans as limited and shallow due to the cultural and religious differences between Saudis and Americans. According to Al Remeih (2017), making friends in the United States can be challenging to some Saudi female students. For some participants, although they had limited friendships with Americans, they mentioned they had good relationships with Americans in general. Another participant, on the other hand, believed it was hard for some Americans to accept her because of her hijab. She stated the only way to make friends in the United States was to change and become more Americanized or move to a more diverse area as she believed that the place played a role in her interactions with Americans. Other participants indicated their friendships with Americans were limited to classmates and tutors. When the participants were asked about the reason of having no or limited friendships with Americans, they highlighted the effect of their English language skills and the influence of their hijab and Muslim identity on their interactions with Americans. These two factors are discussed below.

One of the challenges that Saudi female students encounter in the United States is language barrier. English language skills seemed to play a role in Saudi female students interactions with Americans as most of the participants stated that their English skills negatively influenced their opportunities to interact with Americans. Language barrier is one of the challenges Saudi female students encounter and can greatly affect their social and academic

experience in the United States (Al Remaih, 2017; Davis, 2014; Hakami, 2012, Macias, 2016). For some participants, they were able to overcome that challenge by going to ESL classes and tutoring sessions, practicing their listening and speaking skills, listening to radio and music, watching American series and movies, and attending and participating in social and cultural events. For other participants, they could not overcome the language barrier challenge because of their personality as they were shy, afraid of making mistakes, and did not want to look less intelligent because of their language skills. Instead of taking risks, making mistakes, and practicing the language, those students just tried to avoid interactions with Americans. Exploring the cultural adjustment experience of Saudi women in the United States, Davis (2014) also found language skills and personality played significant roles in Saudi women's adjustment and interactions with Americans.

Besides language skills and personality, their hijab and Muslim identity also seemed to play a role in Saudi female students' limited interactions with Americans. For some participants, keeping their hijab and maintaining their Muslim identity was one of the difficult challenges they faced as they believed that their hijab hindered their communication with Americans. The participants further explained they faced racism and discrimination from some ignorant and uneducated people because they wore hijab. The participants in Al Remaih's (2017) and Davis's (2014) studies mentioned although they faced racism and discrimination from some people in the United States because of their hijab, most Americans are kind and friendly. According to some of the participants in the present study, the diversity of the place plays a significant role in their interactions with Americans as they believed that hijab was not a problem in more diverse places. Davis's (2014) study indicated that unlike less diverse places, participants did not face any kind of discrimination or racism in more diverse areas in the United States. Another participant

believed that the influence of her hijab and Muslim identity on her communication with Americans highly depended on whom she interacted with as she never felt unwelcomed with open-minded and educated people. Coping with the challenge of facing discrimination because of their hijab and Muslim identity, one of the participants indicated that she tried to show people who she really was by smiling, greeting, and being a simple person. She also tried to present her culture by attending and participating in social and cultural events. Other participants, on the other hand, mentioned that they just tried to ignore racist people and focus on their relationships with good, open-minded, and educated people.

Educational difficulties seemed to be one of the challenges encountered by Saudi female students in the United States. In their studies, Al Remailh (2017), Hakami (2012) and Macias (2016) indicated coping with academic and educational difficulties present a big challenge for Saudi female students in the United States. Macias (2016) stated transitioning from an educational system in which students are recipients to a completely different one in which students are much more active can be a real challenge for Saudi female students. The participants in the present study mentioned they faced a big challenge adapting to the American educational system as it was completely different from the one in Saudi Arabia by adjusting to the American teaching and learning methods and their new roles as active students. While students in Saudi Arabia only listen to the teacher, take notes, and prepare for exams, they are expected to do much more in the United States and be active participants, make presentations, engage in discussions, and work on projects. Besides the different teaching and learning style, language seemed to present another challenge in education as the participants mentioned that they needed to spend much longer time on studying and working than a typical American student would need. With time and practice, eventually, the participants were able to overcome their

academic and educational challenges by believing in themselves, reminding themselves of their goals, working hard on their English language skills, and spending a lot of time studying and working.

Another difficulty faced Saudi female students in the United States was familial challenges. Being a mother and a student at the same time presented a serious challenge for Saudi female students in the United States (Al Remailh, 2017; Hakami, 2012; Macias, 2016). For Saudi female students in the United States, making a balance between family duties and academic responsibilities was a real struggle, especially that they were away from their families who used to offer a big help. According to the Cultural Dimension Theory, people of the collectivistic cultures expect their relatives or members of their group to look after them in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Moving from a collectivistic culture to an individualistic one, therefore, presented a big challenge for Saudi female students who used to have their families by their sides. As a result, they had to manage to depend on themselves, do school work, and take care of their children. Besides balancing responsibilities between their family duties and academic life, Saudi female students' role and responsibilities as mothers added another pressure as they were responsible for cooking for their families, helping their children with their school work, and spending some time with their husbands and children. Saudi female students who participated in this study indicated that their role and responsibilities as mothers made them sacrifice their academic and social life for their families. They added that instead of socializing and attending and participating in academic and social events, they spent most of their time with their families. Saudi female students' responsibilities as mothers made them sacrifice their academic and social life for their families. Discussing the importance of education, jobs, and family, most Saudi women indicate that their husbands and families come

first (Al-Khateeb, 1998). Exploring how Saudi female students managed to balance responsibilities and cope with such a challenge, the participants highlighted the benefits of time management, sharing responsibilities, and daycare services.

As the study was conducted after the historical changes Saudi Arabia witnessed during the last 2 years, it was important to ask Saudi female students whether they felt that Vision 2030 and the recent changes that Saudi Arabia experienced would change their experiences in the United States or change the way they perceive themselves. All six participants emphasized the positive influence of Vision 2030 as they became stronger, more confident, and more independent. The participants further added that Vision 2030 would change the way people in the United States perceive Saudi women as they always pictured them as second-class-citizens who are deprived from their own rights. Some of the positive aspects and effects of Vision 2030 and the recent changes that took place in Saudi Arabia that came up and were repeatedly mentioned by the participants were (a) Empowerment of Saudi women, (b) Gaining more freedom, (c) Receiving equal job opportunities, (d) Becoming stronger, more confident, and more independent, and (d) More excited to work hard and go back to Saudi Arabia. For other participants, on the other hand, they believed the effect of Vision 2030 and the changes Saudi Arabia witnessed during the last 2 years on the experience of Saudi female students in the United States would be even greater for those who will be coming to study in the United States in the next few years. They mentioned for those who came from a completely segregated society where women could not drive and be responsible for themselves, transitioning to an open and free society in the United States presented a real challenge. For those who will be coming to study in the United States after the recent changes that Saudi Arabia experienced and after

gaining more freedom in the Saudi society, their transition to the United States would be less challenging.

Discussing Saudi female students' experiences in the United States, most participants indicated they enjoyed their life experience for different reasons such as life was easier in the United States, they enjoyed more freedom, they learned about other cultures, and they had an opportunity to grow and develop their personality. Another aspect discussed with the participants was whether their social and academic experiences met their expectations. While most of them replied "yes", two participants indicated their social and academic experiences did not meet their expectations. For those who said their social and academic experiences met their expectations, they stated they faced some challenges in the beginning, but were able to overcome all the difficulties with time and patience. The participants also mentioned they improved their English, they had a good academic experience, they achieved their goals, learned about other cultures, they met new people and made friends, and they developed their personality. For those whose experiences did not meet their expectations, they pointed out that being in a less diverse area of the United States negatively influenced their social and academic experiences, they did not have American friends as they expected, and their academic experience was not satisfying as they expected more resources and more support, but that was not the case. When the participants were asked what a Saudi female student needs to have a good experience in the United States, a number of interesting advices were highlighted such as the importance of working hard, ambition, determination, persistence, managing time and responsibilities, flexibility, being open to other cultures, living the experience, and trying the American way of life.

Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion

This final chapter summarizes the key findings of the present study from the online survey and the follow-up semi-structured interviews and presents them in relation to the research questions, existing literature review, and the theoretical frameworks guided this study.

Implications of the study are also highlighted in this chapter. These implications are mainly drawn from the findings from the survey and interviews. The chapter then continues to discuss the limitations of the study. Chapter 6 concludes with providing some recommendations for future research.

Summary of Major Findings

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data from the survey and interviews, social challenges were the most difficult acculturation challenge encountered by Saudi female students in the United States. Engaging with the American community and making friends seemed to be some of the social challenges facing Saudi female students. All Saudi female students who participated in the interviews indicated they had either no or limited friendships with Americans. LeBaron and Hausheer (2013) explained it is challenging for Saudi women to get involved in the American society and make friends because of the stereotypes surrounding Saudi and Muslim women. Some participants mentioned it was difficult for some uneducated people in the United States, especially those in less diverse areas, to accept them because of their hijab. For other participants, although they had limited friendships with Americans, they mentioned they had good relationships with them in general. Another reason preventing Saudi female students from getting involved with the American society and making friends is their multiple roles and responsibilities as students, wives, and mothers (Zhang, 2016). Saudi female participants stated instead of socializing and attending and participating in academic and social events, they spent

most of their time with their families. English language skills also seemed to play a role in Saudi female students' interactions with Americans as most of the participants stated that their English skills negatively influenced their opportunities to interact with Americans.

Cultural challenges appeared to be the second most difficult acculturation challenge facing Saudi female students in the United States. Some participants mentioned there was a conflict between their own culture and the American culture. Valdes (1986) stated the acculturation process of international students is highly influenced by the degrees of differences and similarities between their home culture and the new culture. For Saudi female students, coming from one of the most conservative countries around the world to a completely open and free society presents a real challenge. For some participants, the challenge was only at the beginning as they experienced cultural shock when they first arrived in the United States. With time and getting involved with the community and their Saudi friends, they were able to overcome that challenge. Familiarity with the American culture before coming to the United States, however, made it easier and less frustrating for other participants to adapt to the American culture. Davis (2014) mentioned having enough information about the American culture before coming to the United States helped reduce Saudi women's culture shock and facilitate their adjustment process. Regarding their adaptation to the American culture, some participants indicated that they had to change and adjust their culture as they had to change their hijab style, learn to interact with members of the opposite sex, adapt to the American way of life, and acquire new traditions. While some participants explained they did not have to change, but they wanted to change as they were excited to live and enjoy the experience and try the American way of life, other participants found themselves unconsciously changing and becoming more Americanized with time and engaging in the American way of life.

Familial obligations were the third acculturation challenge facing Saudi female students in the United States. Saudi female participants indicated that it was difficult to be students and mothers at the same time. Being a mother and a student presented a serious challenge for Saudi female students in the United States (Al Remaih, 2017; Hakami, 2012; Macias, 2016). For Saudi female participants, making a balance between family duties and academic responsibilities was a real struggle. Being away from their families who used to help them with their children, Saudi female students face another challenge as they had to manage to depend on themselves, do school work, and take care of their children. Moving from a collectivistic culture to an individualistic one, therefore, presented a big challenge for Saudi female students who used to have their families by their sides. Saudi female students' multiple responsibilities as mothers added another pressure as they were responsible for cooking for their families, helping their children with their school work, and spending some time with their husbands and children. As a result, Saudi female students preferred to work individually as they spent most of their time at home with their family instead of socializing, attending, and participating in school events. According to Al-Khateeb (1998), most Saudi women put their husbands and families first even before their education and work. Exploring how Saudi female students managed to balance responsibilities and cope with such a challenge, the participants highlighted the benefits of time management, sharing responsibilities with their husbands, and daycare services.

The fourth acculturation challenge encountered by Saudi female students, based on the data from the survey, was language and academic difficulties. Language barriers are one of the challenges Saudi female students encounter and can greatly affect their social and academic experience in the United States (Al Remaih, 2017; Davis, 2014; Hakami, 2012, Macias, 2016). For Saudi female participants, their English skills negatively influenced their opportunities to

interact with Americans. Language barrier seemed to present another challenge in education as the participants mentioned that they needed to spend much longer time on studying and working than a typical American student would need. Besides language barrier, Saudi female participants indicated they needed to adapt their learning strategies to succeed in the American universities. Coming from different educational backgrounds, international students face major problems coping with the new educational system that is completely different from the one they used to in their home country (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1998). Macias (2016) stated transitioning from an educational system in which students are recipients to a completely different one in which students are more active can present a real challenge for Saudi female students. Coping with language and academic difficulties, Saudi female participants highlighted the benefits of tutoring sessions, practicing listening and speaking skills, listening to radio and music, watching American series and movies, and attending and participating in social and cultural events. They also discussed the importance of believing in themselves, reminding themselves of their goals, working hard on their English language skills, and spending a lot of time studying and working.

Psychological and confidence issues appeared to be the fifth acculturation challenge facing Saudi female students in the United States. According to Saudi female participants, being away from their family and friends was a major issue that negatively influenced their emotions. As Saudi female students come from a collectivistic culture and are strongly connected to their families, being away from them can affect them emotionally (Macias, 2016). Despite that challenge, most participants mentioned they were pleased about their decision to study in the United States. They stated experiencing life in the United States helped them become stronger, more independent, more responsible, and more confident and pointed out that being in a diverse country such as the United States helped them learn about other cultures as they had the

opportunity to meet and communicate with people from all over the world who presented different countries, languages, and cultures. The participants also expressed their satisfaction with their English language development and academic achievement by stating that they have enjoyed their academic experience in the United States and learned a great deal from it. Another aspect that was discussed was the influence of the recent changes that Saudi Arabia experienced during the past 2 years on Saudi female students' experiences in the United States or the way they perceive themselves. Most participants indicated they felt stronger, more confident, and more independent after the recent changes in Saudi Arabia and the empowerment of the role of Saudi women in the country. The participants further added that Vision 2030 would change the way people in the United States perceive Saudi women as they have always pictured them as second-class-citizens who are deprived from their own rights. Some of the positive aspects and effects of the recent changes that took place in Saudi Arabia that were repeatedly mentioned by the participants were empowerment of Saudi women, gaining more freedom, receiving equal job opportunities, becoming stronger, more confident, and more independent, and more excited to work hard and go back to Saudi Arabia. Other participants believed the effect of the changes that Saudi Arabia witnessed on the experience of Saudi female students in the United States would be even greater for those who will be coming to study in the United States in the next few years. They mentioned for those who came from a completely segregated society where women could not drive and be responsible for themselves, transitioning to an open and free society in the United States presented a real challenge. For those who will be coming to study in the United States after the recent changes that Saudi Arabia experienced and after gaining more freedom in the Saudi society, their transition to the United States would be less challenging.

From Saudi female students' responses to the acculturation challenges survey, discrimination challenges appeared to be the least challenging issue facing them in the United States. The participants further indicated people in the United States did not avoid talking to them or were rude to them because of their hijab. Previous studies also found Saudi female students' religious challenges related to their hijab and Muslim identity were the least challenging issue in the United States (Al Remaih, 2017; Davis, 2014; Hakami, 2012). Even for those who experienced discrimination, they emphasized it was uncommon and only in less diverse areas of the United States and from ignorant and uneducated people, and that most Americans were kind, friendly, and accepting (Al Remaih, 2017; Davis, 2014). Saudi female students who participated in the interviews also mentioned they only faced discrimination from uneducated people. The participants believed the influence of their hijab and Muslim identity on their communication with Americans was highly dependent on whom they interacted with as they never felt unwelcomed with open-minded and educated people. They further emphasized the significant role of diversity as they believed that hijab was not a problem in more diverse places in the United States.

The role of Saudi female students' demographic variables on their acculturation challenges in the United States was also explored. While the participants' demographic variables of Age, Living in big city or small town, Previous overseas experiences, Educational level, English skills self-rating, and Marital status significantly influenced Saudi female students' acculturation challenges in the United States, there was no significant relationship between participants' acculturation challenges and their Regions of origins in Saudi Arabia, Regions of residence in the United States, Length of residence in the United States, and Children.

Implications for Practice

In light of the findings of this study, a number of implications can be drawn. Discussing the experiences of Saudi female students in the United States, one needs to understand the significant roles of Saudi female students, American professors and students, English language centers, offices for international students, and student services, and how they all greatly contribute to improving Saudi female students' experiences in the United States.

For Saudi female students to have a good experience in the United States, participants in this study emphasized the importance of considering diversity when selecting the university they plan to attend as they need to make sure that it is a diverse university with a high percentage of international students and people from different backgrounds. According to the participants, the more diverse the university is, the easier and the more enjoyable their social and academic experiences would be. Saudi female students also need to be flexible, open to other cultures, live the experience, and try the American way of life. According to LeBaron and Hausheer (2013), Saudi students tend to isolate themselves as they usually prefer to live alone or with other Saudi students. Living in their small Saudi community and limiting their communication and social experiences, Saudi students face difficulties mingling with the American society. Therefore, Saudi female students need to try to get out of their bubble and engage in the American community to make friends and improve their English skills. The importance of managing time and responsibilities was also highlighted by participants as it would greatly help Saudi female students, especially mothers, create a balance between their academic and social life and their family responsibilities.

For Saudi female students to have pleasant experiences in the United States, American professors and students also need to be trained to communicate with people from different

cultural backgrounds and Saudi female students in particular. Conferences, seminars, and workshops may be organized to introduce Muslim and Saudi students, their culture, their needs, and the challenges they are going through in the United States. Cultural programs and events may be also planned to bring domestic and international students together and celebrate diversity through a variety of activities such as outdoor sports, community service, cultural fairs presenting art, music, and food. These types of programs and events would enhance awareness of cultural diversity and promote acceptance, tolerance, respect, and appreciation of all cultures. English language centers, offices for international students, and student services may all cooperate to make that happen. These cultural programs would also help Saudi female students overcome language and cultural barriers, increase their community engagement, and help them make friends and improve their English and communication skills.

To help Saudi female students overcome their academic difficulties, English language programs may provide students with a course that focuses on academic preparation including study skills, time management strategies, academic skills including reading, writing, note taking, group discussion and projects, and presentations. Many Saudi female students indicated their first semester was overwhelming because of the differences between the Saudi and American educational systems, teaching and learning styles, and teachers' and students' roles. Therefore, the skills and strategies discussed above would greatly help Saudi female students and prepare them for their first academic year.

Limitations of the Study

While the current study has yielded rich, interesting, and valuable findings that provided a deep insight into Saudi female students' experiences in the United States, a number of limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was limited to Saudi female students in the

United States and the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other populations. The sample of this study included 100 participants. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure (KMO) of Sampling Adequacy was .690, and 6 is usually the lowest possible. A larger sample size with a KMO above .8 would increase our confidence in the results. Although this study was limited to only 100 Saudi female students, those participants presented a variety of backgrounds including; age groups, regions of origin in Saudi Arabia, regions of residence in the United States where they live and study, some live in big cities while others in small towns, had different length of residence in the United States, had different past overseas experiences, presented different educational levels, different levels of English skills self-ratings, different marital status, and some had children while others did not.

Second, the data gathered from the participants were self-reported and were collected through online survey and semi-structured interviews. If these two data collection methods were combined with other methods such as observations or language tests, it might reveal different results. As the main purpose of the current study was to explore the experiences of Saudi female students in the United States and the acculturation challenges they encounter from their own perceptions and opinions, surveys and interviews were utilized as it was thought that they would best serve that purpose.

Recommendations for Future Research

Since the current study was limited to 100 Saudi female students living and studying in the United States, future research studies may include a larger population of Saudi female students. Including a larger sample could yield other interesting results in relation to the role of participants' backgrounds and demographic information on their acculturation challenges in the United States. As the effect of Saudi female students' English proficiency on their acculturation

challenges was examined based on the participants' English skills self-rating, future studies may add other measurements of participants' English skills such as their TOEFL or IELTS scores to achieve more accurate results.

An interesting area for future research may be an exploration of the perspectives of those who have a direct contact with Saudi female students such as domestic students, faculty members, international office staff, tutors, or conversation partners. Exploring different perspectives may add a rich input, enable us to see the bigger picture, and provide a deeper understanding of Saudi female students' experiences in the United States.

Finally, as the current study investigated the effect of the recent changes and the empowerment of Saudi women that Saudi Arabia experienced in the last two years on Saudi female students' experiences in the United States, some of the participants believed the effect of these changes would be even greater for those who will be coming to study in the United States in the next few years. They explained that for those who will be coming to study in the United States after the recent changes that Saudi Arabia experienced and after gaining more freedom in the Saudi society, their transition to the United States would be less challenging. Therefore, it would be interesting for future research to explore the effects of these historical changes on the experiences of future Saudi female students who will be coming to study in the United States in the next few years.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Acculturation Challenges Survey

Part 1: Demographic Questions

1. Select your Age group from the following:
18 - 22 _____ 23 - 29 _____ 30 - 39 _____ 40 - 49 _____ 50+ _____

2. Which region in Saudi Arabia are you from?
Central region _____ West region _____ East region _____ North region _____ South region _____

3. Which State are you studying in? _____

4. I live in: big city _____ small town _____

5. How long have you been in the US?
Less than 1 year _____ 1 – 2 years _____ 3 – 5 years _____ more than 5 years _____

6. Have you been to other countries before coming to the US?
Yes _____ (If you answer “YES”, answer the following question)
No _____ (If you answer “NO” go to question 7)
 - How long have you been in other countries?
Less than 6 months _____ 6 months – 1 year _____ 2 – 3 years _____
more than 3 years _____

7. Select the Educational level that you are currently in:
English language program _____ Bachelor _____ Master _____ Ph.D. _____ other _____

8. Financial sponsor: self-sponsored _____ SACM-sponsored _____

9. How would you rate your English skills?
Poor ____ OK ____ Good ____ Very good ____ Excellent ____

10. Select your marital status: single _____ Married _____ Divorced _____
 Widow _____

11. Do you have children? Yes _____ No _____

Part 2: Scale of Challenges Faced by Saudi Female Students in the United States

This scale has been adapted from Hakami’s (2012) study and has been modified to serve the purpose of this study. It is designed to explore the challenges that Saudi female international students encounter while living and studying in the United States. Please choose one answer that best describes your agreement with the stated challenges.

Note: Please provide your best answer from your opinion even if the statement is not applicable.

SA: Strongly Agree, **A:** Agree, **D:** Disagree, **SD:** Strongly Disagree

		SA	A	D	SD
1	Being away from family and friends has a negative impact on my emotions				
2	I experience discrimination because of my hijab and Muslim identity				
3	It is hard to interact with male students because it conflicts with my culture				
4	Education in my country is different from education in the U.S.				
5	Family duties and responsibilities conflict with my academic life				
6	I have many American Friends				
7	Making friends with Americans depends on my English mastery				
8	I feel isolated from the American community				
9	I am home sick				

10	I need to adapt my learning strategies to succeed in the American universities				
11	I seek social relationships in the U.S.				
12	I take advantage of volunteering opportunities				
13	I attend and participate in cultural and social events organized by Americans				
14	It is better to be with my family when studying abroad				
15	My educational success depends on my mastery of the English language				
16	My own culture conflicts with the American culture				
17	People in the U.S. avoid talking to me because of my hijab				
18	I feel uncomfortable when there are male classmates				
19	It is difficult to make friends in the U.S.				
20	It is hard to study in the U.S. when you have kids				
21	I am satisfied with the level of my academic performance				
22	I am pleased about my decision to come to study in the U.S.				
23	I attend and participate in public meetings and private parties where most of the people are Americans				
24	I have to acquire new traditions to get along in the U.S.				
25	I prefer to work and study individually				
26	The American culture has a negative impact on my psychological health				
27	It is hard for me to be a parent in the U.S.				
28	My English language skills prevent me from talking to people in the U.S.				
29	I was culturally shocked when I first came to the U.S.				
30	I like to engage and participate in study groups				

31	I would like to work in the U.S. to improve my English language				
32	I have more family responsibilities than I had in my country				
33	It is hard to understand the U.S. educational system				
34	It is hard to be a single when studying abroad				
35	The new Saudi vision 2030 would positively influence my experience in the U.S.				
36	I feel more self-confident after the recent changes in Saudi Arabia in general, and in women's role in particular				
37	I have heard racist comments from people in the U.S.				
38	Language is the most difficult challenge in the U.S.				
39	It is hard to start a conversation with people in the U.S.				
40	I am afraid to practice my religion obligations such as praying or wearing hijab in the US				
41	People in the U.S. are rude to me because of my hijab				
42	Students services and academic support provided for international students meet my needs				

Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Was the US your first choice to complete your studies? Why or why not?
2. Do you enjoy your life and learning experience in the US? Why or why not?
3. Is it difficult to adapt to the US culture? How?
4. How often do you socialize with Americans?
5. Did your English skills affect your opportunities to interact with Americans and to adapt to the American culture? If yes, in what ways? How do you cope with this challenge?
6. Did your Muslim or Saudi identity influence your opportunities to interact with Americans and to adapt to the American culture? If yes, in what ways? How do you deal with this challenge?
7. Did you feel that you had to give up/adjust your culture or change your identity to fit in the American society? If yes, how? What do you do with such conflict?
8. What are the most difficult challenges when living and studying in the US? Can you give an example from your experience? How do you cope with these challenges?
9. Do you feel that the crown prince Mohammed bin Salman's vision 2030, that aims to develop Saudi Arabia and empower women's role, would change your experience in the US, the way you perceive yourself, or the way others perceive you? If yes, how?
10. Did your social and academic experiences in the US meet your expectations? How?
11. In your opinion, what does a Saudi female student need to have a good experience in the US?
12. If you go back in time, would you make the same decision and come to the US to complete your studies? Why or why not?

Appendix C: IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Compliance
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

October 19, 2018

PI Name: Samar Aldhahri

Advisor and/or Co-PI: Emily Thrush

Submission Type: Initial

Title: Sociocultural and Academic Acculturation Challenges Encountered by Saudi Female Students in the United States

IRB ID : #PRO-FY2019-168

Expedited Approval: October 19, 2018

Expiration: October 19, 2019

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. This IRB approval has an expiration date, an approved renewal must be in effect to continue the project prior to that date. If approval is not obtained, the human subjects consent form(s) and recruiting material(s) are no longer valid and any research activities involving human subjects must stop.
2. When the project is finished or terminated, a completion form must be submitted.
3. No change may be made in the approved protocol without prior board approval.